

Papers Presented at the First Reformed Missions Conference

Hosted by: the Theological College
of the Canadian Reformed Churches

Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

May 31 – June 1, 2005



Editor's Introduction

For several years, some Canadian Reformed missionaries have been dreaming and scheming about a Reformed Missions conference. The idea behind such a conference would be to get as many missionaries and missions-oriented people (i.e. missions scholars, board members, etc.) together for a couple of days to discuss the work we do. For various reasons, such a conference was having a difficult time in conception. That is, until Prof. J. Geertsema and Prof. Dr. A.J. DeVisser took the project on. We are very much indebted to them for their willingness to organize this conference under the auspices of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Over the course of two days, missionaries, pastors, mission board members, students, and professors met together and discussed the work of mission. They came mostly from the Canadian Reformed churches, though we were also grateful to have the involvement of brothers from the United Reformed Churches and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The theme of the conference was to be "Missionary Preaching," although a couple of our papers deviated somewhat from this theme. As evidenced in the papers, our discussions ranged from the more academic/theoretical to the very practical work of sermon preparation on the mission field. What cannot be represented in the papers is the camaraderie, socializing and networking we were able to experience at the Conference – some of which was just as important as the papers.

Finally, a note or two about the editing of the papers. I edited for style, grammar, and spelling. I tried to let each writer retain his own particular style and this includes the manner in which footnotes are presented. I would also note that, unfortunately, not all of the papers could be made available for publication.

May God bless the publication of these papers for the ongoing work of our Lord Jesus to gather his Church!

Wes Bredenhof
Surrey, BC
July 2005

PROGRAM OF THE MISSION CONFERENCE

held at Hamilton on May 31 and June 1, 2005

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***The Scriptural Foundation of Mission
In Its Biblical History and Normative Direction***
J.Geertsema

Introduction

My paper flows from the text called ‘the Great Commission,’ Matt.28:19-20: “Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you.” One aspect of this text is that, from the redemptive-historical point of view, it is the climactic fulfilment of all the Old Testament promises. Another aspect is that it contains normative directions.

As the title indicates, I shall first go through the biblical history, from its beginning to its end, in a few big steps, showing a progressing line. In the second part I intend to point to a number of directions that remain important also for mission preaching in our 21st century, while not everything in the apostolic method of mission can be declared normative and binding.

To work myself a bit into this subject, I read in particular what J.H.Bavinck wrote in his book *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*¹; and the book of Andreas J.Köstenberger & Peter T.’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A biblical theology of mission*.² In the first part, I regularly refer to these two works.

Part One: the historical progress

Section 1: from creation to the forefathers³

Mission in the sense of Mat.28:19, and as used in this paper, is the Lord’s sending of messengers with His gospel word of salvation to the nations. In this sense, we cannot speak about actual mission taking place in the Old Testament dispensation. However, when we go through the Old Testament history this mission is increasingly spoken about as a promise for the future, linked to the coming of the Messiah. This lack of actual mission work caused a number of authors to deny that the Old Testament has any importance for the study and foundation of mission. Köstenberger & O’Brien (25) present some of these authors. However, following Bavinck (11), they say that this view does not do justice to the Old Testament. For a closer look at this Testament makes it “obvious” that it has “considerable concern for the future of these nations.”

Starting now at the beginning, Gen.1, we correctly see that the first foundation for mission to the nations lies in God’s creation work. I want to work this out for a moment. When God created man, male and female, He blessed them and said: ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth’”(Gen.1:26-28). This blessing implies, it appears to me, that God’s intention was from

¹ Bavinck, J.H., *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1964, reprinted

² Andreas J.Köstenberger & Peter T.’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A biblical theology of mission* , Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, (2001) 2002.

³ This division in ‘sections’ follows more or less the division in Köstenberger & O’Brien.

the beginning that there would be peoples, nations, filling the earth: peoples of harmoniously living prophetic priestly kings who have dominion over God's earth. Ps. 24:1 says, "The earth is the LORD's and its fulness; the world and all who live in it", which includes the nations. And in Ps.82:8 God is called to rise up and do justice to the nations because they are His inheritance. Here the Hebrew word *goyim* is used, rendered in the Greek Septuagint with the word *ethnos*, which words can point to nations as socio-political entities.¹ The fulfilment of God's intention of filling the earth with peoples or nations can be seen in Rev.21:2-3, where God is said to be on the new earth with His peoples (*laoi*). Here protology (the teaching of the first things) has come to its eschatological goal, which is the goal also of the mission to the nations.

Another foundational text for mission work is Gen.3:15. It is remarkable that Bavinck does not mention this key text at all. Köstenberger & O'Brien (27) call it "the *protoevangelium*, the first glimmer of the gospel." For, so they write, the fall into sin brought the sinner "under the wrath of God." But God intended "to maintain the covenant with the created order, that is, with man and his world" (28). Hereby these authors point to Gen.9:9-13, where the LORD promises that no flood will destroy the earth anymore. However, for God's maintaining of His covenant with 'the created order,' first of all Gen.9:1-2 should be mentioned, because here God repeats the blessing and mandate of Gen.1:28: Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth.

Genesis 3:15 is a key text, indeed. For this word of God about enmity dominates both (1) the history of revelation, that is, of God's revealing speaking in promise and in judgment, and (2) the history of His great works of redemption and of judgment called biblical or sacred history, since it is described in the Word of God. For when God said that He was putting enmity, God not only *spoke* that He was doing this: a threat of judgment for the Serpent while a promise of redemption for the woman; but God also *did* what he said; He *did* put enmity. It was a *word* of God that was accompanied by his *work, his deed*.

The entire Word of God after Gen.3:15 is a working out, a progressing elaboration of this promising word, this Mother-promise. God *reveals* more and more how He will fulfil this promise. He reveals who this great Seed of the woman is and what He will be and do. He reveals how He will redeem the rest of the seed of the woman and defeat the Serpent with his armies by his judgments on them. The same Word of God after Gen.3:15 is also the *description* of the mighty *works* of God's ongoing activity of putting and maintaining this enmity. God's Word shows the actual deliverance of the woman's seed, and the actual judgments on the Serpent's seed. In line with this text, doing mission work today in obedient service to the Lord, according to His norms for it, is being God's instruments in this same ongoing enmity, this antithesis in which He is defeating the old Serpent.

In maintaining this enmity, God came via Seth and Enoch to Noah. He crushed the seed of Satan, the offspring of Cain and Lamech, in the flood, when Satan had almost conquered the entire world of God and had filled it with violence. But He saved Noah and his family from his destroying wrath, and continued to maintain this enmity when, after the flood, He called Abram out of Ur, out of his father's house, out of idolatry or at least syncretism (Josh.24:2-3, 14-15), when mankind again had united in rebellion against God by building Babel's tower.

When Abram was called, people had again multiplied, and nations had formed and filled the earth. In that situation God promised to Abraham that He would make of him a great nation,

¹ A.R.Hulst, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, eds. Ernst Jenni & Claus Westermann, Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997; vol.2, p.915.

a blessing for all the families of the earth (12:2-3). He would make him into (a multitude of) nations, with kings coming from him (pl.; 17:5-6); a great and mighty nation, with all the nations of the earth being blessed through him (18:18). And God repeated this promise after Abraham had shown his willingness to sacrifice his one son Isaac: “in your offspring shall all nations on earth be blessed” (22:18; 26:4; cf. Ac.3:26 (families)).

Not only would God bless those blessing Abraham, but also He would curse those cursing the ‘father of all believers.’ A picture of this curse and accompanying judgment is presented in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. These cities refused to repent from their wicked life when they rejected God’s final offer of grace, coming to them through Abraham and Melchizedek (Gen.19). In this refusal of God’s blessing through Abraham, they made the measure of their sin full, like the people before the flood did when they rejected Noah’s preaching. God’s promise of salvation for the nations is not for those who harden in sin. It is not for those who do not repent and who so make the measure of their sin full. Together with the fallen angels, and the people who perished in the flood, and unfaithful wilderness Israel, Sodom and Gomorrah are kept in God’s prison awaiting the coming final judgment (Jude 1:5-7; 2Pet.2:4-9; see Isa.24:22). For the wicked there is no place on God’s new earth.

With Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God has come to an important milestone in the history of his revelation, also for mission. This milestone is not only that here for the first time the salvation of nations is explicitly mentioned. It is also that here God reveals His manner or method of saving the nations. Abraham is called ‘father of all believers.’ This points to faith as the way to salvation. The way to escape from God’s wrath and judgment is through faith. Mission workers will call to faith and repentance from sin (Lk.24:47). At the same time, with Abraham, and in a particular way with Isaac and Jacob, God’s method of saving is that of His undeserved faithfulness and electing grace merely on the basis of His divine good pleasure in His Son, and not at all on the basis of human works, not even the ‘work’ of faith. Faith itself, too, is not man’s work but first and foremost God’s free gift of grace, God’s work. The New Testament shows that God’s calling is according to election in Christ Jesus, the elect being effectively called unto faith. This faith the Holy Spirit works as a gift of grace (e.g. Mt.11:25; 22:14; Jo.15:16; Ac.13:48; Rom.11:5; Eph.1:4; 1Th.1:4; 2Tm.2:10 1Pt.1:2). All this underlines the ‘Mother promise’: everything depends on God establishing and maintaining enmity.

While God elected Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the people of Israel, He sent Ishmael away, passed by Esau, and let the nations go in their own ways. This indicated reprobation. In justice, God left people in the sin in which they themselves chose to live their life. On those who refuse to believe, who are vessels of wrath, and whom God endures with much patience, the wrath of God remains (Rom.9:22; John 3:36). Thus Paul, the great missionary to the nations, sees at work in his mission activity both God’s gracious election and God’s just reprobation, just as Peter writes about it (1Pe.2:6-8). Our Lord Jesus Christ, being sent by the Father, had the same experience as a preacher of the gospel. In His prophetic (‘missionary’) labours among the people of Israel, He saw His Father in heaven at work in both election and reprobation (Mat.11:25-27): God was revealing the secrets of the kingdom to babes, but hiding them away from those who claimed to understand. Per consequence, when noticing the hardening in sin (Mt.12:22-32), He began to speak in the form of parables (Mt.13:10-16), that seeing, they might not see.

Section 2: Israel’s calling from God through Moses in her relation with the nations

I deal here with two texts, Ex.19:5-6 and Deut.4:5-8, which show God's will for Israel in her relation to the nations. Köstenberger & O'Brien deal only with the Exodus text. Exodus 19 describes how God commands Moses to prepare Israel for the confirmation of God's Abrahamic covenant with them as Abraham's offspring. In this framework the LORD speaks about Israel's calling with regard to the nations. There are two different translations.¹ Köstenberger & O'Brien take the reading of the NIV's footnote, so that the middle clause "presents the divine motivation for Yahweh's exodus redemption from Egypt: 'Israel is called because the whole world ("earth") is the object of Yahweh's care'."²

This interpretation of Ex.19:5-6 on Israel's calling as God's holy nation in the midst of and for the nations appears to be confirmed by what the LORD made Moses say to Israel in Deut.4:5-8. Here Moses reminds Israel that, at God's command, he has taught them God's decrees and laws for their life in the promised land which they are about to enter. Then Moses says this (v.6): "Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to Him. And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today."

¹ The difference is in (1) the connection of the middle clause with either the preceding or the following clause; and it is in (2) the translation of the Hebrew conjunction *ki* at the beginning of this middle clause. This conjunction can have a causal meaning: 'for', 'because'; or a concessive meaning 'although'. The NIV translates what Moses has to say to Israel in this way: "If you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation." The NRSV and the new Tanakh translation of the JPS translate the middle clause in line with the NIV: "Indeed, all the earth is Mine, but you will be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation." The translation "Indeed ..., but...." (NJPS and NRSV) strengthens the adversative interpretation which is weakly present in the concessive 'although'. This fits a Judaistic reading of the text, but the causal reading 'For', giving the reason for the preceding clause, fits the Old Testament better, as will be shown with the discussion of Dt.4:6-8. In a footnote, the NIV does mention the other reading, which is presented, e.g., by the (N)KJV, NASB, and ESV. Here Moses' words to Israel read: "If you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession, for the whole earth is mine. And you will be for me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation."

² The final sentence in this quotation is a citation from W.J.Dumbrell, *The Search for Order: Biblical Eschatology in Focus*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994, 45. Dumbrell (45-46) who gives the following interpretation of this text: "Israel's role as a priestly kingdom and holy nation means that she must serve the world by her separateness, just as a priest served his society by being removed from it. By her difference, Israel is to lead the world. The holy nation of Israel is to exhibit that character of national purity befitting one that is Yahweh's 'treasured possession'; the priestly kingdom of Israel is to be a worshipping community." Comparing this with Adam's position in Gen.1-2, Dumbrell writes that Adam's role is here in Ex.19:5-6 "devolved on Israel." For Israel's calling "has the world in view" Israel's theocratic constitution is to be eventually, eschatologically, the world's constitution. Since Israel failed to show this model of theocracy to the world, "the coming of God's kingdom was deferred until the advent of Israel's messiah, who embodied all that the true Israel was ever meant to be."

It is clear: Israel's charge is here to lead the surrounding nations to glorifying the great Name of the LORD by her holy life according to God's sound laws in obedient faith. One could say that this is not mission in the strict sense of the word. Israel is here set apart and acting in her own dwelling place, without being sent to other nations. It is rather 'holy-life-evangelism'. Nevertheless, it is the task of conveying the glory of God's Name to the neighbour. This reminds us of Christ's word in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt.5:14-16): "You are the light of the world; ... so let your light shine that people may see your good works [that is: your life according to God's Covenant law of the Ten Words] and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."¹

On the basis of Israel's position and calling to be a kingdom of priests set apart for the LORD, to let the light of God's Name shine before the nations, Köstenberger & O'Brien (35) use a distinction between Israel's, let us say, life-style missionary calling in relation to the nations in the Old Testament period, and Israel's future task, which they call the eschatological task. This will become the church's missionary task revealed in the Old Testament but realized in the New Testament. They agree with others that Israel was not called to send out missionaries to the nations to undertake "'cross-cultural' or foreign mission." They characterize Israel's own history as marked by the term *incorporation* of individual members of heathen nations into God's people. And the actual foreign mission through sending out missionaries is characterized by these authors with the term *eschatological ingathering* of the nations, which then starts with the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost: historically incorporation; eschatologically ingathering.²

From a historical point of view, this section should mention the priests and the sacrifices, They are a foreshadow of the Messiah who will be king and priest after the order of Melchizedek (Ps.110) and as fulfilment of Aaron, while all the sacrifices find their fulfilment in the one sacrifice of Christ. With giving to Israel the Passover Lamb as vicarious substitute for Israel ('s firstborns) at the exodus (Ex.12), and with the burnt offerings and peace offerings at the confirmation of the covenant, while the sacrificial blood was sprinkled on the people (Ex.24:8, within Ex.19-24), God showed that redemption and a covenant relation between Him and His sinful people was only possible on the basis of atoning blood. With adding the ceremonies and sacrifices of the Day of Atonement, God also made clear that the continuation of the covenant was only possible through vicarious sacrifices (Lev.16). All this, the priest and the blood

¹ In Mt.5:21-48 Christ explains and applies the Commandments 6-10; ch.6 is the application of the First Commandment; and ch.7:1-23 that of the Second Commandment, with 7:24-27 presenting the sanctions of the covenant: promise of salvation in the way of obedience to Christ's, while the curse in the way of disobedience. Ch. 5:13-16 is an application of the Third Commandment, the goal of God's covenant, and so of the promise ["I am the LORD your God"] and of all the Commandments, expressed in Mt.5:16 as "that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

² Examples in the Old Testament of Gentiles joining God's people, are Tamar, Judah's daughter-in-law, later taken as his wife, Rahab the harlot of Jericho and the Gibeonites in the days of Joshua, Ruth the Moabites, David's great grandmother, and some of the heroes of David in 2Sam.23; further, the Kerethites and the Pelethites, troops originally from the Philistines under Benaiah (2Sam.8:18, 15:18), and Ittai and his six hundred men, also from the Philistines (2Sam.15:19). And perhaps from the days of Solomon, there were the two authors of some proverbs in Prov.30, Agur, and 31, King Lemuel. Finally, in the days of the prophets we read how the widow of Zarephat became a believer in the LORD through Elijah, as an example for Israel's hardening in unbelief; and how Naaman the Syrian came to faith through Elisha, again as an example of faith for God's own people.

sacrifices, was a foreshadow of Christ Jesus and His expiating and propitiating sacrifice of atonement (Hebr.4:14-10:18).

These gracious gifts of God in Priests and sacrifices are not as such explicitly linked with the salvation of the nations. It is a means of grace for Israel. At the same time, as a foreshadow of Christ Jesus, they are a prophetic (Hebr.1:1) revelation about the great Seed of the Woman in what He will be. Besides being a king (Gen.17:6), he will also be a priest who will bring the ransoming sacrifice for sin as basis for salvation. That this sacrifice is also for the nations is pointed out by the apostle Paul when he writes to the Corinthian church (consisting for quite some part of believers from the Gentiles), “Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been slaughtered.”

Section 3: God’s raising of the two Messianic Kings: David and Solomon

The time of David and Solomon is unique. Here is very much an intensification of God’s revelation of the coming Son of David, Son of God, and, with it, of the calling of the nations to serve the King of peace. But here the means of revelation is not just through prophetic words, but very much through the means of foreshadowing. David and Solomon are special foreshadows of the Messiah, the Son of God, in His person and in His work.¹ At the same time, the history of God’s dealing with His people Israel comes to a climax here. It is a climax, too, in the fulfilment of God’s promises to Abraham: Here are kings coming from Abraham’s offspring. These kings, with the people of Abraham, receive the full territory promised to this forefather: the land from the brook of Egypt to the great River, the Euphrates (Gen.15:18; cf. Ex.23:31).

David and Solomon are the only two kings called “son of God” in the entire history of Israel, as far as I have found. Not any one of the other kings of Israel or of Judah receives this title.² Psalm 2³, often quoted or referred to, and applied to Christ in the New Testament,¹ fits

¹ That David and Solomon are the only two kings in Israel’s entire history who received the title ‘Son of God’ does not deny that all the kings had the calling to act as type for the coming great King, but it does set these two apart from the others. God placed David and Solomon in the middle of Israel’s history, the history of redemption and judgment, as a foreshadow of the final, eschatological fulfilment of God’s promises through His own incarnate Son.

² David in Psalm 2:7; cf also Ps.89:26-27 [not ‘son’ but first-born’]; Solomon in 2Sam.7:14 = 1Chron.17:13 [God’s word to Nathan for David about David’s son, king after him; and = 1Chron.22:10 David repeating, to Solomon himself, God’s word to Nathan; and = 1Chron.28:6 where David again repeats God’s word to Nathan, now to the officials and tribal leaders, who will have to accept Solomon as David’s legal successor. In short, David is called God’s son in God’s decree (Ps.2:7) and confessed to be God’s first-born by God’s own word spoken in a vision to His people (Ps 89:19, 27); and Solomon is named son of God as son after David and foreshadow of the great Son, in God’s prophetic word to Nathan for David (2Sam.7:14, 1Chron.17:13), which is repeated by David to Solomon (1Chron.22:10) and to the officials (1Chron.28:6). In Ps.80:15 “son” refers to the people of Israel, which the context of the vv.1-16 makes clear. This “son” in v.15 is clearly distinct from “the man at your right hand, the son of man” in v.17, cf Ps. 8 and Ps 144, which point to a royal figure.

³ In line with Psalm 2 (Psalm of David acc. to Ac.4:25) are Psalm 60, and esp. Psalms 89, 110, 118, which, however, all speak of the nations only as enemies, without an express call to submit to God’s Messiah and to receive a share in God’s salvation. Parallel with Psalm 2, but speaking of king Solomon (v.1) as king of peace, is Psalm 72, which speaks strongly about all the nations who will serve God’s

exactly in the situation of these two kings (cf. 2Sa.8,10 for David; 1Ki.9:20-21 for Solomon). Ps.2:7 speaks of the king as Son of God; v.8 says that the LORD will give His Son, the King, the nations as his inheritance, and the ends of the earth his possession. The nations with their kings are called upon to kiss the Son, and so to share in the salvation of God given through His King, sharing in the blessing for all who take refuge in him (v.12). If they do not, his wrath, his judgment, will come upon them.

Therefore, it fits in this redemptive historical situation that David says that the LORD spoke to these nations and their kings in His holy wrath: “As for Me, I have set My king on Zion, My holy hill.” Here is the anger of God against these Amorite nations who still were making the measure of their sin full before the LORD. This measure had been full already in the days of Joshua, when Israel was called not only to inherit the land, but also to be a willing part of the LORD’s army that had to execute the His ban on the wicked Canaanite-Amorite nations. It was the LORD’s holy war against them.

The execution of God’s ban which started under Joshua is now further executed under David, God’s anointed King. Before David, Israel’s unfaithfulness and constant apostasy and also Saul’s failures to obey the LORD’s will, made an earlier execution and fulfilment of the promise to Abraham impossible. David, the man after God’s heart, who said (Ps.40) that he, in contrast with king Saul, had come to do God’s will – David was the instrument in God’s hand, God’s son, the messianic king, come to conquer and inherit the nations.

As with the flood and Sodom and Gomorrah, so here is a call to repentance and faith unto salvation, while, at the same time, the threat of judgment for the nations close to Israel is there as well, according to God’s word to Abraham. However, this fulfilment of the promise to Abraham, is only provisional. It is not more than a foreshadow of the final fulfilment, the final realization in David’s great Son, the great Son of the Woman, the incarnate Son of God. He will save all who take refuge in Him. But He will also slay with an iron rod all God’s and His enemies as the true Messiah, the final great Anointed Servant of the LORD. He will crush Satan’s head and throw him with all his “offspring” in the pool of fire, in His holy wrath (Ps.2:9; Rev.2:26-27, 12:5, 19:15). David’s great Son, Christ (Messiah) Jesus on the throne in heaven, will bring God’s nations into His flock. He will come as Judge with God’s final judgment, when the rebellious nations will have made the final measure of sin full in the ‘Man of lawlessness’ (2Thes.2:3-12).

Section 4: God’s promise for the Nations in the Psalms

messianic king. 2Sam.7:14 is clearly the background and basis for Ps.72. In Psalm 9-10, the nations are simply enemies.

¹ Mt.3:17 (v.7), 4:3 (v.7); Lk.3:22 (v.7); Jo.1:41 (v.2), 49 (v.7); Ac.4:25f (v.1f), 13:33 (v.7); 2Co.7:15 (v.11); Hb.1:2 (v.8), 5 (v.7), 5:5 (v.7); Rv.2:26f (v.8-9), 11:15 (v.2), 12:5 (v.9), 17:18 (v.2), 19:15 (v.9), 19 (v.2).

Apart from the royal messianic Psalms, there are quite a number of Psalms in which the nations are called to fear and to praise the God of Israel because of His mighty works of salvation for His people Israel.¹ Bavinck (15-17) says that the call to the nations in these Psalms to fear and praise the LORD is not a form of missionary preaching and does not show compassion with the lost pagan nations. He creates a contrast by claiming: “All such [great Israel-redeeming] events are theocentrically experienced by Israel....The glory of Jehovah, not the need of the heathen, is the overruling motif.”

This dilemma of a theocentric versus a human compassion approach seems to me to be false. Present day mission out of compassion with the lost neighbour should be done for the purpose of the glory of God. A striking denial of this created false dilemma is Ps.87. The joy of “the sons of Korah” is very clear. They are joyful about the people from many nations around Israel who are declared to be known by the LORD and born in Zion as His work, and who are recorded by Him on Israel’s rolls.

Further, when Psalms call the nations to praise the LORD, the God of Israel, because of His mighty deeds of help and salvation for His people, the aim is explicitly God’s glorification, but it is implicitly an invitation to join Yahweh’s people in worshipping and serving Him, the true God. A good example is, e.g., Ps.86. In the verses 8 and 10 the author (David) points to God’s marvellous works which show that He alone is God; in v.9 he sings, “All the nations You have made will come and worship before you, O LORD; they will bring glory to your Name.” Another Psalm is 96; in the vv.8-9 the author (whose name is not mentioned) calls to the nations: “Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his Name; bring an offering and come into his courts. Worship the LORD in the splendour of his holiness; tremble before Him all the earth.” Doing these things implies worship through faith and salvation.

These invitations to the nations to come and to join Israel are fully in line with Israel’s calling to invite the nations through their holy life-style to God’s glory in Ex.19:5-6 and Dt.4:5-8 (see above), and with the appeal in Ps.2 (see above). It fits within the Old Testament ‘*incorporation*’ framework. Redemptive-historically it is not yet God’s time for the ingathering of the nations, and for ‘new Israel’ to send out missionaries.

¹ Psalms 22, 33, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 65, 66, 67, 68, 86, 87, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 102, 148, 149, 150. In Psalms 59 and 82 the rulers and judges of the nations are threatened with God’s wrath, because of the injustice done to the peoples, suffering under their rule; God will do justice to these nations. Psalm 24 sings that the earth with its fulness, the world and all who dwell in it belong to the LORD. The other Psalms do not mention the nations, but in them individuals (e.g. Moses, David, Korach, Asaph, Heman, or anonymous authors) speak about their relation with the LORD, in which often Israel as God’s covenant people is mentioned, too (e.g. Psalms 25, 27, 42, 73). Or they speak in a general way about the LORD in His relation with His people and its individual members (90, 91).

Bavinck is, in a sense, correct when he points to Israel's "spiritual and moral weakness" (17) through which it failed in its calling toward the nations. Israel's history shows how prone she was to apostasy in 'world conformity'. Constantly there was her desire to be like the surrounding nations with their idolatrous religions. In that way, time and again, she rejected God's light for herself, and so also for the nations, and by her unholy lifestyle made herself part of the power of darkness ('seed of the serpent'; see the term "brood of vipers" in Mt.3:7, 12:34, 23:33!). A new covenant was needed. It was promised (e.g. Jer.31) because the first covenant was lacking and "God was finding fault with the people" (Hebr.8:8). And his judgments almost destroyed unfaithful Israel in the Assyrian and the Babylonian exile. Only God's maintaining of the enmity created and preserved a faithful remnant.

However, this Old Testament period of incorporation rather than ingathering was not only a period of Israel's failures through sin, and so of a lacking covenant and of God's anger and judgments on them. It was also a period of wrath and judgments on the nations from the side of God. Not only does God's Word in the Old Testament speak about this in Psalms (e.g. 9-10, 59, 74) and Prophets (e.g. Am.1-2, Isa.13-21, Jer.46-51, Ez.25-32). Also the New Testament helps us to understand this. In Ac.14:16, Paul says to the people in Lystra that "in the past generations" God left¹ all nations to themselves, "to walk in their own ways." This 'leaving people go in their own ways' is always an expression of God's wrath (cf. Ps.81:12; Ro.1:24,26,28; 2Thes.2:11-12) And in Ac.17:30 the same apostle says to the Athenian philosophers, "Therefore, having overlooked the times of [guilty] ignorance, God now commands the people, all and everywhere, to repent." This 'overlooking' means [Bauer, s.v.] "to disregard as not worthy of one's notice" and "to overlook". In line with this, Paul speaks about God, who "in His divine forbearance had passed over ["deliberate disregarded, letting go unpunished" (Bauer, s.v.)] former sins" (Rm.3:25, ESV). These words of the apostle speak, on the one hand, about God's wrath against the sins of the nations in the old dispensation. God let them go in their own ways of sin and unbelief. He disregarded them. But on the other hand, it was restricted wrath. The disregard meant that there was not the execution of full, final, punishment, except where the measure of sin was made full.

¹ The *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*, originally by Baur, 3rd ed. revised by F.W.Danker, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, gives as meaning of the Greek verb, "to let, permit; ... to let go, leave alone."

Our conclusion is that it was not so much Israel's sinfulness and weakness, but rather God's plan that determined the missionary activity to the nations. In this plan, God's wrath had a place, but also the promise of his grace. This promise of grace clearly has the emphasis, as it shows in the many Psalms that address the nations with the call to praise and serve the LORD, and that speak of salvation for them. The disregard will pass and be replaced by God's attention of compassion in Christ.

A few more examples are: Ps. 47: "God is King of all the earth; God reigns over the nations. God is seated on His holy throne. The nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham, for the kings of the earth belong to God; He is greatly exalted." Ps. 67: "May God be gracious to us and bless us ..., that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations; may all the peoples praise you ..., for You rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth." The Pss. 96 to 100 call all the nations, all the earth, to worship God. And Ps. 145, speaks of God's care and providing for all who and all what He made. Therefore, every creature is called to praise His holy Name.

In these Psalms we hear the words of Moses in Dt. 4:5-8 about Israel's calling regarding the nations to attract them to the LORD through their godly lifestyle. Here is longing for and joy about the salvation of the nations and their praising and serving the LORD together with His people Israel. There is longing and promise. This brings us to the next section, and to some extent also the next phase, in the Old Testament history of revelation both of salvation and of judgment in the history of enmity.

Section 5: God's promise for the Nations in the Prophets, esp. in Isaiah

Here the promise is also loud and strong, in particular in the prophecies of Isaiah. Here the link between the promise of salvation for all the nations and the coming of the Messiah is even stronger than in the Psalms just mentioned. We do not forget, though, that this link is also strongly present in Pss. 2, 22, and 72, which we saw, in the section about David, as working with the messianic prophecy of 2Sm. 7:14. It is true, however, that the Prophets in general focus on the relation between God and the people of Israel: on God's judgments on her because of her apostasy and wickedness, and on his promise of forgiveness and mercy in her restoration.¹

When they speak about the nations, it is very much in terms of judgments of God on them because of their sins and wickedness, especially as this is linked to the evil done to God's people. Blocks of judgments on the nations in the Prophets have been mentioned above (Section 4). Most of these prophecies present only judgments and no hope. Exceptions are in Isa. 19:16-25 regarding Egypt and Assyria with Israel in the centre: all three of them together will be blessed and a blessing. Isa. 23:15-18 says that at the end of seventy years the LORD will deal with Tyre, so that it will take up her "harlotry" (trade?) again, the profits of which will go to those who live before the LORD. Further, Jer. 46:26 contains the promise of God that Egypt, after the judgments, "will be inhabited again as in times past"; and Jer. 48:47; 49:6, 39 contain God's promise that He "will restore the fortunes of" Moab, the Ammonites, and Elam, respectively.

We may draw the conclusion, in the light of the history of redemption, starting with the Mother-promise, that specifically those nations receive the announcement of God's wrath and

¹ Köstenberger & O'Brien, pp. 24-44; who correctly reject Jonah's book as having a missionary character, pp. 44-45.

judgment who, as offspring of the Serpent, made themselves act with enmity in their hatred against God's people.

However, there are certainly promises for the nations, linked to the coming of David's Son. We can mention the following: Amos, prophet sent to the Ten Tribes, speaks of God's restoring of David's fallen tent that brings also salvation to all the nations that bear God's Name (9:11-12). Micah, announcing the birth of David's great Son, says that He will rule to the ends of the earth (5:1,4). Zech.14:16 says that "survivors from all the nations which attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles." Finally, Dan.7:14 speaks of "One like a Son of Man" to whom is "given dominion ... that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him." (ESV).

Especially Isaiah jumps out here as God's instrument for the revelation of the Messiah, not just David's Son, Son of Abraham, the great Seed of the Woman, but also God's own Son, for He will be called "Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of peace"(9:6). He is redeemer also for the nations. For He is "shoot from the stump of Jesse" (11:1-2), who "will stand as a banner for the peoples, and to whom the nations will rally" (11:10). And "... in the latter days ... the mountain of the house of the LORD ...shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say, 'Come let us go up to ... the house of the LORD ...that He may teach us his ways'."2:2-3, ESV).

After ch.40 He is called "the Servant of the LORD" whom the LORD will uphold, and on whom the Spirit will be put, who will bring justice to the nations (42:1). And in 49:6 God says to this Servant, "It is too small a thing for you to be My Servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth." See further 45:22-23; 51:4-5; 52:15; (53:12 probably including both Israel and the nations); 55:3-5 or rather 55:3-5:8; 60:1-22: Although this chapter "is focussed on Zion, the vision of this magnificent chapter is world-wide in its scope." For "citizenship in the kingdom of God will not be limited to Jews only, but will be open to people of all nations."¹

This line is continued in the next chapters. The Servant of the LORD, anointed with the Holy Spirit, brings the good tidings of deliverance and healing to the poor and those who mourn: it is the fulfilment of the Year of Jubilee promise (vv.1-3). It will bring the restoration of Jerusalem (v.4), where foreigners will do the rebuilding, while God's people will be priests, ministers of the LORD (vv.5f). Their offspring will be known among the nations and peoples, who will acknowledge God's blessing of His people in Zion (v.9). Then the LORD's Servant, clothed with a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom, sings of his joy in the LORD, who causes Zion to be filled with righteousness. This future glory of Zion is further described also in ch.62 as the City whose citizens are called "the Holy People, the Redeemed of the LORD" (v.12). But this glory of Zion is also for the nations (v.11), for "a banner" is raised "for the nations" (see here again 11:10, where it said that "the root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples"; and see 49:22).

This vision of the glorious future fades into the background, as the present reality of Isaiah's days appears in the foreground in 63:1-66:24. It speaks of God's anger and judgment against the apostates, but also of confession of sins and repentance; and it speaks of prayer for

¹ Barry G. Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, (in the series *The Bible speaks today*); Leicester / Downers Grove (IL): Inter-Varsity Press, 1996; p.231-2

grace and of promises of mercy and salvation for those who humble themselves before the LORD. In this section, in 66:19, the LORD promises that He “will send some of those who survive to the nations, to Tarshish, to the Libyans and Lydians ..., to Tubal and Greece, and to the distant islands that have not heard of My fame or seen My glory. They will proclaim My glory among the nations.” In other words, here is spoken about the LORD sending messengers to the nations, so that they, too, will be gathered to His people.” Rainer Riesner considers this verse (66:19) the blueprint for the apostle Paul according to which he made his missionary journeys, as he writes about them in Rm.15:19b.¹

These data from the Latter Prophets² lead us to the conclusion that all these Prophets clearly show God’s undeserved compassionate faithfulness in maintaining the enmity of the beginning, so that there remained a remnant that served Him, expecting the Messiah, “David.” This remnant was saved from perishing under God’s wrath and judgment against his enemies, both unfaithful Israel and the hateful nations, like Noah was saved from the flood. This remnant was saved in order that the Messiah might come to save both Israel and the nations out of the grip of the Adversary.

Section 6: God lays the foundation for mission to all nations in Christ’s work

Since we deal with the biblical foundation for mission, it is not necessary to pay attention to the Inter-testamental Period. One remark should be made, though, because it refers to New Testament text of Mt.23:15, where our Lord addresses the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees about their “mission” activity, as it seems. He says: “You travel over land and sea to win a single convert.” The difficulty with this word is that primary sources of Jewish and other literature of those days do not speak of such an activity. One solution, mentioned by Köstenberger & O’Brien (55-69), is that the expression “travel over land and sea” is “a figurative, idiomatic expression denoting extensive effort rather than geographical movement (1Maccabees 8:23,32)” (64). The conclusion of these authors is that the mission work of the apostles of Christ, as sent out by Christ Himself with the word (not with a sword) of salvation through Him, is unique for that time and in fact for all times.

¹ Rainer Riesner, *Paul’s Early Period: Chronology, Mission strategy, Theology*; ET (1994) from German by Doug Stott; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998; pp.245-306.

² The Hebrew Bible consists of three parts: the Law (Torah), the Prophets (Nevi’im), and the Writings (Kethuvim). The Prophets can be subdivided into two sections: that of the Former Prophets and that of the Latter Prophets. The Former Prophets are what we call the historical books; in the Hebrew Bible they are: Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings. The books of Ruth, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Esther, Ezra and Nehemiah belong to the third part, the Writings. The order of the books we have in our translations comes from the Septuagint, the Greek Translation of the Old Testament. Personally, I find it a pity that we do not follow the order of the Hebrew Old Testament. For in this way we have lost the indication that the historical books, too, should be considered as prophetic books: the prophetic description of the history of God’s great works from creation to the coming of the Messiah.

As for the time described in the four Gospels, critical scholarship has claimed that our Lord Jesus Christ was against mission to the nations. The basis for this opinion is that the Gospels say that He sent His disciples to preach only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mt.10:5-6), and that He seemed to be reluctant to heal the daughter of a Canaanite woman (Mt 15:21-28). These scholars see here a tension with the end of the Gospel, which, again according to their opinion, cannot have been a word of the Lord Himself. Bavinck points here to Albert Schweitzer (30). Köstenberger & O'Brien (92) correctly reject a long list of solutions for this so-called problem of tension, made up by the scholars themselves. They disagree also with the solution suggested by C.L.Blomberg, namely that Christ acted in the same way in which Paul worked later: first the Jews, then, when they reject the gospel, the Gentiles. Köstenberger & O'Brien deny that here is any tension. They explain that the time that Christ preached on earth was still part of the Old Testament incorporation period.

This is the correct interpretation. The change in method of mission came when the Lord had ascended to the heavenly throne and had poured out the Holy Spirit to enable the apostles, and the church with them and after them, for this world-wide calling of now *gathering in* all the nations. The *eschatological* fulfilment of the Old Testament promise of the ingathering had only then arrived, when Christ as Head leading the operation, could do so from the heavenly throne.

Our Lord first had to lay the covenantally legal basis for the *ingathering* of all the nations. He first had to make atonement and reconciliation through His death, His act of perfect obedience, as ransom, payment, for the expiation of sin and as propitiation, the taking away of God's wrath because of sin. On this basis, our Lord received the Holy Spirit, promised to God's people, when He ascended to the throne, receiving all legitimate power in heaven and on earth. So He could claim and conquer all those from the nations whom God had given Him and for whom He had died, whom He had bought. The project could not begin while He was still incognito, in humiliation. This first going to the lost sheep of Israel was entirely according to God's plan.

Köstenberger & O'Brien (93) write in this context that they take over the "dynamic that is well corroborated by the other Gospels and Acts: Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, offers the kingdom to Israel; Israel rejects Jesus, issuing in his crucifixion; the kingdom is offered universally to all those who believe in Jesus the Messiah, Jew and Gentile alike." This appears to me too close to the suggestion of Blomberg which they reject (see above). It makes the mission to the Gentiles too much dependent on the Jewish rejection. This going to the nations was to take place on the basis of God's plan and promise as revealed in the Old Testament. Had the Jews not rejected Christ, the gospel still had gone to the nations. Further, the mission towards the Jewish people did continue, even after 70 A.D., when Jerusalem was destroyed; and this mission to all nations, including the Jewish, was to continue to the return of Christ.

Section 7: The fulfilment of the Old Testament promise of God's ingathering of all nations into His people from Pentecost to the Parousia

Matthew tells us the command of Christ to his apostles to go and make disciples of all the nations teaching them to obey Christ's commandments. Luke has recorded this command of the Lord for mission work as spoken earlier, on the day of his resurrection, and with different words. In Lk.24:47 the Lord said that the gospel of "repentance and forgiveness must be preached to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem"; and in Ac.1:8, He says, "But you will receive power when the

Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts describes how Christ led the apostles in the gathering of His church in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, then in Antioch and from there, via Asia Minor and Greece, eventually in Rome.

Together with the letters of the apostles, and Revelation, the book of “Acts [of what Christ Jesus further did and taught, 1:1] relates to us the final phase in the history of the great works of God in promising and fulfilling the coming of the Great Seed of the Woman, the Son of Abraham, the Son of David, the King, who defeated the great Serpent at the cross, and who on this basis, went on to defeat him, and works towards the full crushing of his head and the annihilation of his armies.

Acts does not present us with biographical notes and anecdotes on the life of the apostles, mainly Peter and Paul; but it presents the continuation of the prophetic (note 16) description of God’s great works in the history of redemption, in Christ. It presents God holding on and winning back His creation, His nations, through His incarnate Son for the new earth where He will be all in all.

There is another remarkable aspect of the mission charge in Luke 24:47. Christ gives this charge here not only with a different formulation, but also with a different ground. The ground for the mission commission in Mt.28:18 is: “To Me is given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore go...” But in Luke 24:47 this ground is the promising prophecies in the Old Testament. We read in Luke’s account first that Christ “opened the mind of the disciples so that they would understand the Scriptures.” Then the Lord told them what they had to understand as being written in the Scriptures. “He said to them: ‘It is so written that the Christ will suffer and rise on the third day; and that repentance unto forgiveness of sins must be proclaimed in His Name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.’”

In other words, not only was it written that the Christ had to die and rise on the third day, but it was also written that in His name repentance unto forgiveness of sins was to be proclaimed to all the nations.” Thus, the ground for the mission charge to all the nations is that “It is written.” God’s Old Testament Word commands it. The Servant of the LORD, the Messiah, who died and rose according to what is written, in obedience to the Word, continues as the Risen One with obeying the Scriptures. He continues with fulfilling His task, His charge, according to what is written. When Luke gives us the account of what Christ Jesus, as the Risen Lord, as the King over heaven and earth, further did and taught, it is the account of what He is still executing in obedience to what is written. It is amazing. In these words of the Lord that repentance unto forgiveness in His Name must be preached to all the nations since this stands written, we see all the Old Testament promises (in the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings) come together. Here is the climax, the fulfilment. The Lord, Christ Jesus, God’s Servant-Son, will Himself make sure that all these promises are now going to be fulfilled. He sends his apostles; his witnesses, his church, to proclaim repentance unto forgiveness, to all nations. And He will come back when this *task* will have been executed completely, to the very end, see also, e.g., Mt.24:14; Rv.14:6. Then He will bring the new heaven and the new earth. The old earth will be no more. And all evil, all sin and all unrepentant sinners and hardened evil-doers will have been removed from God’s earth. For the wicked there is no place on God’s cleansed earth. New Jerusalem will come down on the new earth, inhabited with all God’s nations, God’s peoples. God will dwell with them and they with God. God’s creation work will have come to its glorious destination to the glory of Father, Son, and Spirit.

Another noteworthy aspect of this word in Lk.24:47 is that here the contents of the apostolic proclamation is defined as the call to “repentance unto forgiveness of sins.” This is the gospel for a world lost in the grip of sin and so of the old Serpent. Acknowledging sins and confessing them in the light (Name) of Christ, His death at the cross, with repentance, with turning away from those sins, turning to Christ and to the Father, through the Word of the Holy Spirit, that is salvation. Here the saving aspect is emphasized, the purpose of the Lord’s death and resurrection.

Acts 2 presents another important aspect of the New Testament fulfilment of the Old Testament promise of God saving the nations. This aspect is linked to the promise with the great commission: “I am with you to the completion of the age.” For this mission to be accomplished, divine power is needed. It will be a battle against the evil one, cast out of heaven onto the earth. He will attack the apostles and the apostolic church with violent persecution, and with sneaky deviations from and falsifications of the truth of the gospel of Christ. Therefore the Holy Spirit is poured out on the apostles and on the entire church. From now on, the congregation has the promise of the Holy Spirit leading her and strengthening her for her task, writing God’s words, His Law, on the tablet of their hearts. So the church, the congregation, will be the place where the Spirit of God dwells.

This, too, is part of the climactic fulfilment of the Old Testament promises. We have this promise of the Holy Spirit dwelling in God’s church in Joel 2, quoted by Peter to explain the signs of His coming. Other texts are Isa.32:15; 44:3; Ez.36:27; 37:14. Christ Jesus points to this gift of the Spirit in his conversation with the Samaritan woman. He said that the time was near that the official place of worship would not only not be Mount Gerizim, but also not the temple in Jerusalem. Soon those worshipping, would worship “in Spirit and truth” (Jo.4:23). The Spirit is the Holy Spirit; and the truth is Christ Jesus. Worship in Spirit and Truth is placed over against worship at Mount Gerizim and in Jerusalem. This points to places of official worship of God’s congregation, which is the place where the congregation gathers for worship. The congregation is called the dwelling place, the temple, of the Holy Spirit, who will make the church God’s dwelling place, God’s temple (see also 1Cor.3:16). Other words of Christ about the sending of the Holy Spirit are, e.g., in 14:16, 26; 16:7-15.

However, this climactic gift of the Holy Spirit, given to the church of Christ to be gathered out of all the nations, points also to the revelation of God’s wrath coming to *a* [not yet *the*] climax. God begins now to gather in the barn His people from all the nations in Christ. His people in Christ receives the Holy Spirit, as promised. But Zion, the temple in Palestinian Jerusalem, where the Lord Jesus was crucified, and which is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt (Rv.11:8), did not receive the Holy Spirit. The Spirit passed by the temple of precious wood and gold, and filled the house where the congregation of Christ was gathered. From this day of Pentecost, the earthly temple is no longer the place where God dwells. Christ Jesus, in Person, is the fulfilment of the promise of Immanuel, “God with us”. He, so, is also the fulfilment of the temple, of Zion. He pointed to this Himself when He had cleansed the temple and was asked from where He received the right to do this. He said: Break down *this* temple [the temple that He was Himself, fulfilment of the stone building He had just cleansed], and I will restore it in three days” (Jo.2:19). Christ Jesus will be with His apostles and apostolic church in the Holy Spirit, dwelling in her. In the truly apostolic church the Spirit will dwell as his temple. The Spirit-less temple of stone will soon physically be destroyed, while on Pentecost already it was undone, desolated spiritually.

In his Pentecost sermon, Peter makes this evident in the way he works with the quotation of Joel's prophecy. He gives the prophecy up to Joel's words (2:28-32a in Ac.2:17-21) that "everyone who calls on the Name of the LORD will be saved." Joel then goes on with saying: "For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD said". And the prophet concludes with the words: "and among the survivors are those *whom the LORD calls*." These final words "*whom the LORD calls*" we find back at the very end of Peter's sermon (Ac.2:39): "the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, for *those whom the LORD will call*. Peter added the words "all who are far off", pointing to the nations.

However, the point is that the words of Joel about Zion and Jerusalem as location of escape are 'missing' in Peter's sermon. Or rather, Peter has replaced them with his words about Jesus of Nazareth, whom they crucified according to God's counsel, but whom God raised from the dead and exalted by his mighty right hand to the throne in heaven, where He received the Holy Spirit, promised to God's people and from where He poured the Spirit down on this group of believers in Christ Jesus, whom God made Lord and Christ, Messiah. And if they believe in Jesus as the Christ and repent from their sins and are baptized into his Name, then they, too, will receive the Holy Spirit, promised to them and their children. For then they will belong to the survivors. Survival is in Christ Jesus, in his community, no longer in Zion, in the temple, in earthly Jerusalem. Earthly Jerusalem has made itself part of the seed of the Serpent. It has chosen the side of the Adversary, Satan, by rejecting and crucifying the Christ of God. In the Spirit's passing the temple of Zion there is judgment. And when Zion-Jerusalem hardens itself in its sin, discarding a period of patience of forty years as a final call to repentance and faith¹ in Christ Jesus, another great Day of God's wrath will be poured out upon her in 70 A.D. It is terrible to fall into the hands of the living God.

From now on, the triune God, Spirit and Father and Son, will dwell in the church of believers in Christ Jesus. There will be his temple. There will be escape from wrath for all who call on the Name of the Lord Jesus, whom the Father chose in Christ, and calls to the praise of his glory. This congregation is the New Jerusalem, earthly division. The heavenly division is above where God is, and the angels, and the spirits of those made perfect (believers), and Jesus Christ, the Mediator of the New Covenant (Heb.12:22-24). God will bring these two divisions on the new earth in the Bride, glorious New Jerusalem, adorned for her Bridegroom, her Lord and Saviour.

Then everything will be totally fulfilled, and heaven and earth will have come to their final destination.

¹ Compare the final time of patience of 120 years as final call to repentance and faith before the flood, when Noah built the ark; and the final years of patience and call to repentance for Sodom and Gomorrah after their deliverance through Abram; and the forty years of patience of God and final call for repentance to the Canaanites. They all made the measure of their sin full, when they refused to repent. Compare also Rv.16:13-14: God sending three misleading evil spirits in his anger because of the refusal to repent; cf 2Thess.2:9-12.

Part II: Normative Direction

Turning now to normative directions from God's Word, I may again tell you nothing new. But it can be enriching to reflect together on the riches of our Christian service as we have received it in God's Word. When I speak about *normative direction*, I acknowledge that not everything in the Scriptures is normative. S.Greijdanus makes the distinction between "Word of God in a *formal* and in a *material* sense, or with *historical* authority [*auctoritas historiae*]: what it tells us is historically true and reliable; and with a *normative* authority [*auctoritas normae*]: it has to direct our life, our work).¹ When the apostolic church is called to continue the work of mission with which the apostles were charged, and when the apostles did miracles, does that mean that present day missionaries have (to be able) to follow Paul's method and, e.g., perform miracles, too (see Mk.16:17-18)?

I have divided this second part into three sections: first, the message in its contents, second, the messengers, and third, the method of bringing the message. This second part will be even less exhaustive as the first part. Much more could be said and should be written.

Section 1: The Message in its contents

The contents of the mission commission is based on our Lord's claim that to Him is given all authority in heaven and on earth. Being the Son of God, He always had all authority. And in Mt.11:27, speaking as the incarnate Son of the Father, who is the Messiah, God and man, He says: "All things have been handed over to Me by the Father." In his words with authority, and in his works of healing and of commanding powers of creation and animals, He showed to have all power.

Nevertheless, since Scripture teaches that His atoning death laid the basis for reconciliation of all things in heaven and on earth (Col.1:20; cf. Isa.53:11-12: "After the suffering of His soul,... Therefore I will give Him a portion with the great..."), it seems that the conclusion is justified that here the authority that God gave Him is linked to His atoning death and resurrection. This means that it is given to the *incarnate* Son of God, who is the Second Adam in glory, who defeated Satan and sin with His obedience, who ransomed all things, especially the elect from all nations, and now has the covenantal, forensic, right to claim them and to gather them into his flock through the preaching of the gospel of his victory. It is now His rightful authority over heaven and earth over against Satan's illegitimate stolen power (Mt.4:8-9). The cleansing of heaven from Satan's evil presence took place only *after Christ's ascension* (Rv.12:7-12), when the ransom for redemption had been paid. Therefore, since He has all authority in heaven and on earth, the apostles have to go and preach the gospel of Him as legitimate Lord and Saviour to all the nations, and make them His disciples, His subjects, part of His holy army in the ongoing enmity and spiritual warfare on earth (Rev.12:13-18; Eph.6:10-20).

Becoming a disciple, a student or learner of a teacher, presupposes knowledge about him, and through knowledge true faith in Him, both fruit of the preaching of His Name. This Name of the Lord Jesus Christ is Christ Jesus Himself, as He revealed Himself and made Himself a Name through His words and works. The Name, the revelation about Him, is written down for us in

¹ S.Greijdanus, *Schriftbeginselen ter Schriftverklaring*. (Principles of Scripture for the Interpretation of Scripture); Kampen: Kok, 1946, p.118-119.

both Old and New Testament. Therefore, the Name of Christ is for us Christ Himself, but then according to all that is taught about Him in the Scriptures, nothing more, nothing less. And being a disciple means learning to know Him more and more according to His revealed Name and living out of Him according to His teaching; living by His Word and doing His will.

Knowing and following Christ Jesus as his disciple implies knowing God the Father and God the Holy Spirit as well, and living for God through the Holy Spirit in obedience to the Scriptures. Being baptized into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit presupposes this. The three are one. The covenant relation for which the blood of Christ is the basis, is the covenant relation with the triune God. Christ Himself spoke of His blood as the blood of the covenant (Mt.26:28 and Mk.14:24: “My blood of the covenant”; Lk.22:20: “the new covenant in My blood”). As Christ lived entirely by ‘what is written’, so a disciple learns to live by ‘what is written.’

This belonging to the Lord as his disciples, in the covenant relation with God through the Holy Spirit, is an ongoing disciple-relation with Christ. The disciples, being baptized, continue learning. The apostles had to teach the believers to preserve and observe all the things Christ had commanded them. The verb rendered here as ‘to preserve and observe’ (in the NIV, to obey; Gk.: *teerein*) has the meaning of keeping, holding on to something by guarding it; and so to observe, to obey.

Further, Christ formulates the object of the observing as “all the things that I have commanded you.” This formulation is the very same as used constantly in the Law (Ex.-Dt.) for the LORD’s command to Israel to observe His commandments.¹ It is evident, therefore, that these words “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” reflect the divine authority of Christ spoke in v.18. Christ is here not only the new Moses, the Mediator-Servant; He is at the same time their LORD God Himself (Jo.20:28; cf. Mt.5-7, Christ teaching with authority).

In short, the contents of the proclamation of the apostles is Christ Jesus, God’s incarnate Son, who and what He is; their LORD God who ransomed them and claims them as His people and now commands them to live in His fellowship, according to His holy will to His glory and as His light for the nations (Dt.4:5-8, Mt 5:13-16). Thus, in this “make disciples” and this “teaching them what I commanded you” (the apostles), we can see the structure of the new covenant in Christ’s blood.

In this way, it becomes clear that in this grand commission, this great charge, we have to do with a parallel with the Old Testament or covenant: In Exodus we read how God, through His mighty deeds, and through Moses, revealed and gave Himself to Israel as the LORD their God, and then confirms his Abrahamic covenant with the people that came from Abraham, promising: “I am the LORD your God” which means: ‘I am with you.’ And then He comes to the people with His commandments, telling them what it must mean for them, for their life, to believe in Him as their God. He teaches His commandments through Moses as rules of faith in Him.

¹ Examples of the use of this verb in the Septuagint, in the Law (= Gn.-Dt.), as translation of the Hebrew *tzawah* [=‘to command’] for God’s commanding are Gn.2:16 (Adam); 21:4 (Abraham); Ex.23:15 (the people); Dt.4:13 (the Ten Commandments to the people). The Hatch & Redpath Concordance gives two pages with together five columns of texts with this verb. In these texts this Hebrew verb is used most often with the LORD as the commanding subject.

Here, in the New Testament, Christ Jesus reveals Himself and gives Himself to the nations in the apostolic preaching, calling them out the world of sin and unbelief ('the new exodus'),¹ and bringing them into the new covenant, namely those from all the nations who come to faith in Him through God's electing sovereign good pleasure in Him. And then, again through the apostolic teaching, He commands His new covenant people to observe His commandments, which are the same as God's commandments, (see the Sermon on the Mount, Mt.5-7). A remark is appropriate here about Paul's preaching on his missionary journeys and his teaching in his letters to the churches. In his preaching he proclaimed Christ Jesus and Him crucified and risen from the dead and now Saviour for and Lord over all. In this way he made people who came to faith in Christ disciples of Christ. Then, in most of his letters, first he intensified his teaching about who and what Christ is for them. Thus, in his teaching about Christ, Paul brings Christ Himself to the churches, the people of the new covenant. And through this teaching, Christ Himself comes to His people, and says: 'I am Christ Jesus, your Lord and Saviour, I have redeemed you; and I promise to be with you to the end of the age.' When Paul continues in the second part of his letters with explaining what faith in this Christ Jesus as their Redeemer now means for their daily life, then it is Christ Himself, who comes to His people, telling them what faith in Him means for their daily Christian life. He comes to them with His commandments, His will for their life in the covenant, in His fellowship.

It is very important, also for missionaries, to see these things. They are to bring this rich Christ in all His richness to the nations. In their preaching Christ calls them out of the world of unbelief and sin, unto Christ, and into the covenant with God. And through their missionary preaching Christ then comes to them with the instruction of His will, His commandments, that is: of what it means for their life to believe in Christ as their Redeemer; what it means to believe in God as their heavenly Father.

Allow me to show very briefly, in a few examples, how Paul proclaimed Christ, God's Son, their Saviour, in His astounding richness with its fulness of deliverance that encompassing all of created life.

In the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians, the apostle works out specifically how sinners, through faith, can be righteous before God through the righteousness, the obedience, of Christ in His atoning sacrifice; and how they so can be adopted as God's children who, in the fellowship of faith with Christ, will now live again with God, holy for Him, their Father, through the Holy Spirit of Christ.

In the Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul teaches how lost sinners, spiritually dead and condemnable through their sins, are made alive Spiritually (2:1-10) on the basis of the pure grace for them in God's sovereign, undeserved election in Christ crucified (1:3-10). (See what is said above in section 1 about election and reprobation.) From this election of sovereign grace flows God's immeasurably great divine power, at work in those chosen. It is this divine power that worked faith in those believing in Christ. And it is through this immeasurable divine power that believers can persevere in their faith, and can overcome the powers of the evil prince of darkness, to the glory of God (2:15-22).

¹ An example is: David W.Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus*, in *Biblical Studies Library*; ET from German, 2000; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002.

In the epistle to the Colossians, this apostle writes that God delivered us out of the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have the forgiveness of our sins. This Son of God's love is the image of the invisible God, through whom and for whom God first created all things, heaven and earth, and through whom God, then, also reconciled all things, heaven and earth, to Himself, through his blood (1:13-20). And this created life is being renewed and restored now too, according to God's creation order, in the church, the believers, of which Christ Jesus is the Head (1:18). Through the Spirit, Christ makes believers new persons, new humans, who put on "the new person, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph.4:24); the new person who "is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (Col.3:10).

This doctrine, this Word of the Lord, teaches in this way, the link of unity between creation and redemption. What is created in the beginning, that is delivered from sin and so restored, in principle, according to the original creation order. Paul applies this sound doctrine about Christ's restoring of created life after its created order to personal life, to married and family life, and to daily labour and labour relations (Col.3:1-4:2). For all of this life Christ is the Redeemer. For all of this life, there truly is deliverance from sin (guilt and tyranny). In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge for faith and, thus, for a redeemed life (Col.2:3).

A last example here: In his first Epistle to the Corinthians the apostle deals first with a number of sins in the congregation (division, incest, litigation, fornication), and then with a number of questions (marriage, eating of meat that comes from pagan sacrifices, Lord's Supper celebration, resurrection). Paul attacks all these sins and answers all these questions by pointing to Christ Jesus, who and what He is for the congregation. He teaches how they have to live out of Him as their Redeemer in every aspect of their life.

These are examples of Paul's preaching of Christ to the churches, to present just a partial (not the fulness) of the contents of Paul's preaching and teaching of the crucified and risen, living Christ, and redemption through Him. The churches to which he wrote his letters were still more or less young churches. Really, they were still mission churches. Through this sound doctrine they had to grow into mature, well-established, faithful, well-functioning churches of the Lord. Their calling was to be churches faithful to the Word of God, in order to be the light of Christ shining for the world around them. This sound doctrine for the churches is to be the same for the mission fields.

This sound doctrine is to be believed and adhered to with precision. In the epistles mentioned here as examples, Paul presented his sound doctrine in opposition to Judaistic falsification (Romans, Galatians) and syncretistic heresies (Colossians). In this respect I was pleasantly surprised to read how Köstenberger & O'Brien stress as very important for mission work the warning of Paul to watch for and reject any deviation from the gospel as he preached it (227-250). They notice this warning in most of Paul's epistles, as well as in the General Epistles and Revelation.

The gospel preaching has to remain pure, according to the preaching of the apostles. Falsified gospel preaching ruins not just the church, but also mission work. We see, indeed, how the apostle Paul is constantly fighting against wrong, un-sound teachings about Christ, emphasizing the sound doctrine. Paul can fulminate against those who twist the gospel of Christ around (Gal.1:8-9, Col.2:4-23, and e.g. 2Cor.10-12, Php.3:2, Ti.1:9-11, 1Jo.2:19, Rv.2:20). Christ Jesus is our wisdom. Christ and Him crucified was placed by God over against the

wisdom of Greek philosophers, of Greek academia, and Greek rhetoric, and eloquence, in form and contents. Christ and Him crucified, that builds the life that God created and restores. Human wisdom, apart from Christ deceives and destroys; it does not truly build up, because it is inspired by the old Serpent. What is not out of faith in Christ is sin.

Therefore, Liberalism, Roman Catholicism, and Arminianism, all under the influence of humanism in one form or another, is an attack on His glorious Name. That is also the case today, since it all deviates from the sound doctrine of the Scriptures, from God's wisdom in Christ Jesus. The antithesis, also on the mission field, is to be, not only with paganism in any form, whether in old forms such as animism, worship of forefathers, and so on, or in new forms of humanistic liberalism. The antithesis is also with all unbiblical, twisted, falsified, Christian doctrine. Therefore, the contents of the Reformed Confessions, as helpful and binding instrument, is important not only for established churches, but also for new mission congregations. The glory of the Name of our Lord and God is at stake in these matters, and the gathering and preservation of His church on its sole foundation: Christ Jesus.

The church is and is to be bulwark of the truth. In both doctrine and practice of life she has to show the truth of God's Word, of all that is written, with the triune God, especially with Christ Jesus, in the centre. From this truth we are not allowed to remove anything; nor are we permitted to add anything (Dt.4:2, 12:32, Prov.30:6, Rv.22:18-19). But then, this is not only a matter of the sound *doctrine*, but also of conduct. Christ teaches us first to do ourselves what He commands, and then also teach others (Mt.5:19-20). A preacher's teaching but not practising himself what he preaches makes his words an empty failure. This brings us to our second section.

Section 2. The messenger

The first messengers were the disciples-apostles, who were taught by Christ Himself. They were the eye and ear witnesses of what the Lord spoke and did. And they received the Holy Spirit, who made them remember and observe what the Lord had taught them. Having received the Holy Spirit, they were all dedicated men. The very same dedication we find with the special apostle Paul. And, in opposition to the view of liberal scholars, the apostles were fully aware that what they spoke and what they wrote was the very Word of God. They were conscious of the fact that they were appointed and sent by Christ to witness as eye and ear witnesses (Ac.1:21-22), guided by the Holy Spirit (Ac.2; Jo.14:16, 26, 16:7-15). Paul writes (1Ths.2:13) that he thanks God "that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers" (ESV). Peter says the same (1Pt.1:25) when speaking about the imperishable seed that regenerated the readers, being "the living and abiding word of God"; and after a quotation from Isaiah 40, he adds: "And this is the word that was preached as gospel to you."

The messengers after the apostles could no longer claim to be inspired and to speak the very word of God. But in 2Tm.2:2, we receive clear requirements from the apostle Paul for the next generation of preachers-missionaries. Timothy has to entrust the things he heard from Paul throughout many witnesses to faithful (reliable) men who will be able to teach others also. Here is first of all the care for the preservation of the New Testament Word of God, as Paul proclaimed it. We may say: Paul and the other apostles. Timothy heard it before (literally: [*dia* + genitive] = throughout) many witnesses. These witnesses are the churches. Paul is speaking about his preaching and teaching throughout his second and third missionary journeys.

In 1:13 Paul wrote that Timothy himself had to hold on to the things he heard from Paul. “What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound words with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.” What Paul charged Timothy with, he now tells Timothy, in turn, to charge others with. These others must be faithful, reliable, trustworthy. The sound doctrine must be safe with them. This is the first requirement. Further, they must also be competent and qualified. Paul writes, “who will also be qualified.” The Greek word for ‘qualified’ expresses two aspects, namely that of being gifted and of being competent. On the basis of the future form of the verb: “who will be,” we may conclude that Paul has in mind gifted men becoming competent and qualified through studying. Timothy has to choose men who *are* faithful and who have the gifts needed for the charge, and who thus, through training, *will be* competent and qualified. It is just normal that, as with Timothy himself, Timothy’s pupils will increase their knowledge and their understanding of the apostolic doctrine, and of the Old Testament teaching, through a period of instruction.

Thus, Paul’s charge to Timothy to teach his successors gives us a description of requirements for ministers of God’s Word. In an article about his preparatory studies for missionary, Rev. C.J. Haak, now professor of missiology in Kampen, begins with the following quotation: “... as it is cruel to send a badly armed army into battle against an enemy, just as cruel it is to have a badly prepared missionary to go into battle against heathendom.¹ The apostles themselves received a training of three years from the Lord, and had the promise of the help of the Holy Spirit to make them remember what the Lord had taught them (John 14:26). And the apostle Paul had a thorough training in Jerusalem as Pharisee (Ac.22:3; Php.3:5), while he shows in his speeches (Ac.17:22-31), and epistles (e.g. 1Cor.1-2; Col.2:8, 20ff) that he had a thorough knowledge of the Greek-Roman world and its philosophies, as well. He was well-trained to do battle against the Judaistic and the pagan human so-called ‘wisdom’.

We conclude that the Scriptures point to the necessity of a thorough training for all ministers of God’s Word, which includes missionaries. They need to be well-trained to be well-prepared. They have to know the world in which they are to do battle against the spiritual enemies in the air, those who are influencing and dominating the world in which they are placed as minister-servants of the Word. Here they have to stand firm in the same old enmity as set and maintained by God. However, when the apostle speaks of “men who are faithful, reliable, then the emphasis remains first of all on the knowledge and competency and faithfulness with regard to God’s Word, the Gospel of Christ. To do battle properly, the first and foremost need is and remains a solid knowledge of and insight in the doctrine of the Scriptures about God, about His Christ. Without a solid knowledge and right understanding of the true faith, in faithfulness to God and his Word, no soldier of Christ can resist the enemy, leave alone, conquer him. Our Lord defeated him with His “It is written” (Mt.4).

I want to make a final remark. More than once I heard someone say that well-established, mature churches should receive the more gifted ministers, while those with more average gifts could go to the mission fields. The argument was that a mission post or young mission church

¹ C.J.Haak, “Tussen wal en schip: de voorbereiding van de zendeling” (Between Quay and Ship: the Preparation of the Missionary); in *Zendingspanorama: Het Zendingswerk van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, 1946-1976* (Mission Panorama: The Work of Mission of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands); editors Dr. J. van Bruggen and Dr. C.Trimp; Amsterdam: Bolland, 1976, p.183; the quotation is from J.Rauws, *Nieuw Guinea*, Den Haag, n.d.

still needs milk, the food for babies, while a mature congregation needs solid food. We need to be very careful with the use of this metaphor of milk contra solid food. A look at 1Co.3 and Hb.6, shows that such a use of the milk-solid food comparison is not found in the New Testament. A good look at the context of Paul's speaking about milk contra solid food can help us. We find the expressions in 1Cor.3:2 and Hb 5:12,13. In 1Cor.3:2 Paul writes to a congregation where the members should be mature. But through their own fault of allowing the ideas of the philosophy or wisdom of the world still rule their mind and actions, they are like babies in Christ. They do not think and act Spiritually; they think and act 'fleshly' that is: in worldly patterns. Because of guilty lack of true Spiritual insight in who Christ really is, they are babies [though "*in Christ*"; Paul does not deny their being believers in the Lord], who need milk. It is not a very young age in faith that makes these Corinthian believers babies, but sin, guilty ignorance, does.

The same counts even more for the believers addressed in Hebr.5:12-13. They are members of the church in and around Jerusalem. This is a church which had been in existence for more than thirty years. They are in danger to fall away from the faith because they do not hold on to Christ Jesus but let themselves be tempted to turn back to the Law of Moses. They were tempted to turn back to an Old Testament without Christ, but with Israel in the centre.¹ It is a threatening apostasy that makes them babies in the faith who need the milk of the basic teachings again.

The third text in the New Testament that speaks about milk as food for babies is 1Pe.2:2. But here is no contrast with solid food for the mature. Here the milk as food stands by itself. It compares all the members of the church, all believers, with newborn babies, with children in the Lord who have received new life. Such babies long, or even: crave, for their food, which is the milk from their mother. They want milk that is not mixed with other stuff. They want unadulterated, pure milk. So the believers, regenerated (re-born!) by God's Word, long for more of that pure Word for their growth. Many translations speak of "pure spiritual milk." It is better to translate here "the unadulterated milk of the Word,"² so that also in translation the connection can be seen of this expression "milk of the Word" with what Peter writes in 1:23-25: "... you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding *Word of God*.... And this is the *Word* that was *preached* to you."

The task of the missionary is to preach the gospel of Christ unadulterated and pure, as we also heard Paul say to Timothy (2Ti.1:13 and 2:2). He has to lay the one good foundation (1Cor.3:10-11); and then he is to build on this foundation with good, solid building material. For, under the Lord's blessing, he has to build, not just one congregation, but an entire federation of solid, mature, faithful churches. Ministers at the home front often are surrounded by many colleagues and mature councils. Missionaries on the mission field, on the other hand, are often few, even lonely and by themselves. And they do not have experienced elders, but they have to

¹ J.Geertsema, "Is Conversion after Apostasy Impossible: A Look at Hebrews 6:6"; *Clarion*, vol.51 (2002), nr.2 and 3

² The basic meaning of the Greek adjective rendered by the phrase "of the Word" is "belonging to words". The Greek noun for 'word' is *logos*, and the adjective derived from it is *logikos*. See R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of I and II Epistles of Peter, the three Epistles of John, and the Epistle of Jude* Columbus, Ohio:The Wartburg Press, (1945) 1960, p.79-80; and P.H.R. van Houwelingen, *1Petrus: Rondzendbrief uit Babylon*, Commentaar Nieuwe Testament, Derde Serie; Kampen: Kok, 1991, p.75.

train new Christian men, and mould them into faithful, knowledgeable, competent leaders. Can we, perhaps, say that in Paul Christ sent the best and most competent of the minister of the Word in the earliest church as a missionary to the Gentiles in the Roman world? And did He not send another top-servant, Peter, to do mission work among the Jews, anyway at the time of Ac.15 (Gal.2:7-8)? It should be said, though, that James, the brother and servant of the Lord, was also an excellent minister-leader in and for the church in Jerusalem. Let us say that the work of mission needs at least as good, competent, faithful and gifted ministers as the churches at the home front. At least.

Section 3: The method of bringing the message

1). Apostles and fellow-workers are sent

Faith is through hearing, hearing through preaching, preaching by being sent (Ro.10:14-17). Christ first personally sent the Twelve apostles as eye and ear witnesses of what He said and did. This was their unique position. As such witnesses they are the foundation of the church (Eph.2:20; Rv.21:14). Then, through the Holy Spirit and by means (of spiritual leaders) of the congregation at Antioch in Syria, Christ sent out Barnabas and Saul (Ac.13:1-3). At a later stage, we see Paul accompanied by other fellow-workers. Silas was one. He was sent, together with Judas, by the Jerusalem church, to accompany Paul on his second journey.

About Timothy we read that he was appointed with the laying on of hands, which points to official church (presbytery) appointment (1Ti.4:14), while also Paul himself did this laying on of hands (2Ti.1:6). In Ac.4:1-6 we read about the choosing and appointing of the Seven 'Deacons'. This was done with the involvement of the church. And the ordination was done with the laying on of hands. For elders, Paul urges Timothy not to do this laying on of hands too soon. Training is needed and testing for competency.

Although these data are few, there is here a basis for the conclusion that those receiving an office of ruling or teaching/preaching elder and deacon in the earliest churches were appointed, by the leaders (presbytery or body of elders), with the involvement of the congregation. This leads to the conclusion that the custom in our Reformed churches that missionaries are called and sent out by local sending churches is a biblically based custom which is to be maintained. If mission work is a task or commission given to the churches, the churches themselves should do this work; not para-church organizations, or individuals on their own initiative, or little groups of enthusiastic, well-meaning individuals. In such cases there is no proper ecclesial supervision over such individuals or groups, or institutions; not with regard to doctrine, nor with regard to conduct. What is given to the church, should remain the church's responsibility.

2). Apostolic helpers

In Acts we see apostles mostly go together, such as Peter and John (Ac.3-4; 8:14-25, though Philip was by himself, and most likely Paul, in Ac.9, and Peter in Ac.9:32-43 and 10. But Paul is practically always accompanied by companions on his journeys, described in Ac.13-20. First Barnabas and Saul, then Paul with Silas, taking also Timothy along. We can conclude that it is not wrong to send out one mission worker, but that it is better to have teams of workers,

so that they can support and assist one another. This is also in line with what Christ Himself did when still on earth. He send out the Twelve two by two (Lk.9) and afterward seventy disciples in the same way (Lk.10).

On this point we can conclude that it is better to send teams of workers to the mission fields, but we cannot say, on the basis of biblical data, that this is an absolute must.

3). Male and female helpers

Romans 16 presents a list of fellow workers whom Paul sent ahead of himself to Rome to preach the gospel and establish a church there, so that he could use this church as sending church and head-quarters for his trip to Spain (Ro.15:24).¹ This list contains the names of men and of women. Also in Phlp.4:2 Paul speaks of Euodia and Syntyche “who have laboured side by side with me in the gospel”, beside Clement. Rom.16 mentions Phoebe (v.1), Prisca (v.3) with her husband Aquila called “fellow workers”; Mary (v.6) “who worked hard for you” [Junia(s) is unsure]; Tryphaena and Tryphosa, and Persis(v.12), “workers in the Lord”; as well as the mother of Rufus (v.13) who was also as a mother for Paul; and Julia and the sister of Nereus (v.15). The qualifications are presented mostly in broad terms, and are not defined very precisely, except that of ‘acting as a mother’. Most likely the situation in Rome was that of a number of house churches in the wide city of Rome. Groups of believers gathered in the homes of the people mentioned here. It is well possible that the ladies of the house, wives or sisters, helped the male leaders in visiting and instructing women in their homes, where it was not proper for the male apostle or elder to enter by himself to do his pastoral work. It is also quite well possible that not only the mother of Rufus, but also the sister of Nereus was taking care in matters of food, and so on. This too was working in the service of the gospel, cf. Lk.8:3.

This working with women in the gospel must not be interpreted in the wrong way. There remains what Paul writes in 1Tm.2:9-15, that, on the basis of God’s creation order, he does not allow women to have authority over man in the church. Authoritative leadership is the responsibility and task for men. At creation, women received the blessing and task to bear children, for God wanted man and his wife to multiply and fill the earth. God still wants his new earth full. And it is still so that He makes his eternal covenant with parents and their children. Holding on to God’s creation order, redeemed from sin and devoted to God, still builds up life, at home, and so for society. However, as Paul makes clear in 1Cor.7 and 1Tm.5, this does not mean that every woman has to get married and/or have children. Also for the unmarried women the apostle writes that they can devote themselves completely to the Lord an serving Him. They can be involved in gospel and church work, also on the mission fields. One does not have to be ordained as office bearer in order to be allowed to “work in the gospel.”

4). Must miracles accompany mission preaching?

¹ This is the (I think correct) conclusion of J. Van Bruggen in his studies *De Oorsprong van de kerk te Rome* (The Origin of the Church at Rome), and *Het Raadsel van Romeinen 16* (The Riddle of Romans 16); Groningen: De Vuurbaak, 1967 and 1970, respectively.

Must missionaries also be able to perform miracles? No, miracles were done by Christ and by the Apostles. As for the Lord's miracles, many are described rather extensively in the Gospels, but sometimes they are reported in a general way. We read in Acts that Peter performed miracles,¹ and parallel with him, the same is said about Paul.² Here too, some miracles are described but others are recorded in a general way. Hebrews 2:3-4 is noteworthy here. Here is spoken about the word of salvation that was "first *spoken* by the Lord", then "confirmed to us by those who had heard it" [from Him], "while God, added His witness to it [the Word] with signs and wonders and with various miracles, and with gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to His will." In this word of Hebrews we see that miracles are linked to the Lord and the apostles, *speaking God's Word*; and that these miracles are done by God to confirm the message of the Word that was preached.

This indication of a restricted use of miracles, as done by Christ and the apostles, finds confirmation in the link of Heb.2:2-3 with 1:1-2. This epistle begins with this statement about God's *speaking*: "... God, having *spoken* formerly to the fathers through the prophets, has *spoken* to us in the last of these days through Him who is His Son." Both forms of the verb, that of the participle ('having *spoken*') and that of the main verb ('*spoke*'), point to a completed action in the past. Just as God's revelatory *speaking* in the past, through the prophets, has come to a full end, so His revelatory *speaking* in the present, through His Son, has come to its completion. It is clear that it is this *speaking* of God through His Son, first in person and then through His apostles, that is accompanied by signs and miracles. Where this revealing speaking has come to an end, there also this specific accompaniment of signs and miracles can be considered to have come to an end.

Moreover, the apostle John writes in 2:11, after his account of the water that was changed into wine at the wedding, that this was "the first of the signs Jesus did at Cana, and He manifested His glory", with the result that "His disciples believed in Him" (see 4:54 about the second sign). At the end of his account of Christ's work on earth, John writes that the Lord Jesus "has done many other signs before His disciples which are not written in this book" (this Gospel). "These, however, are written in order that you [hearers, readers] may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have eternal life in His Name."

The fact that the apostle John wrote down "these signs" means that the miracles of Christ were not only done for the disciples to believe in Him and to confirm their faith, but that they have the same function and goal for the readers of his Gospel. In other words, the miracles which the Lord performed when on earth (and those done through the hands of the apostles) were not only done for the confirmation and strengthening of the faith of the disciples, but were done and written also for the strengthening and confirmation of the faith of the church of all times.

¹ Ac.3:1-10, a lame man; 5:15-16, many, general; 9:32-35 paralysed Aeneas; 9: 36-43, Dorcas made alive; 5:12 by all the apostles. Ac.12, Peter's deliverance from prison was a miracle, too.

² Ac.13:11, Elymas made blind; 14:3 general for Paul and Barnabas: "the Lord bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders through their hands"; 14:8-10 a crippled man; 16:18, a girl healed from an evil spirit of divination; 19:11-12, [many, general [like 5:15-16], 'God did extraordinary miracles through the hands of Paul' with handkerchiefs and aprons; 20:9-10, Eutychus made alive; 28:8-9, the father of Publius, chief official on Malta healed, and many others; 28:3-5, Paul himself was not harmed by the poison of a viper, which was a miracle, too.

This is a parallel with Israel in the Old Testament. God delivered Israel out of Egypt with great miraculous deeds that showed His power. These mighty deeds of the LORD in Egypt are mentioned time and again in the Old Testament Scriptures. This indicates that these miracles were a constant reminder of God's great works for Israel's redemption, and so were written and done for the strengthening of the faith also of the later generations, even for us, church in the new dispensation. In this way, the New Testament church has many mighty, miraculous deeds of God, written in the Scriptures, to confirm and strengthen her faith with.

It is clear, therefore, that the church at home and on the mission field does not need other, additional, miracles. This is also the cautious conclusion of Roland Allen, a missionary in China from 1895-1903. He does not deny the possibility of miracles, but concludes that their absence does not put "an impassable gulf between the first century and today."¹

The text that seems out of this restrictive line seen so far, and therefore a bit apocryphal, is Mk.16:17-18. It speaks in a more general way. It connects miracles to "those who came to faith." In the vv.15-16, the Lord charges the Eleven to go to the entire world and proclaim the gospel to every creature; and He adds that he who has come to faith and has been baptized will be saved, but that he who has not come to faith will be condemned. Then He says: "And these signs will follow [accompany] those who have come to faith. In My Name they will cast out evil spirits, speak with new languages, and in their hands take up snakes, and when they drink something fatal, it will not harm them; on the sick they will lay their hands, and they will be well."² Also here, miracles are given in the context of mission, confirming the gospel message, as expressed in Ac.14:3 and Heb.2:4. In the Scriptures, miracles given by God are never done for the sake of the miracles, or for the sake of miracle doers. And in the light of the other texts, also this more general word appears to be restrictive to the same apostolic period.

Our conclusion is that although God can still give miracles, according to this word in Mark, and no one would deny that He can, the main line in the New Testament is that God added miracles to the gospel preaching of Christ and of the apostles to confirm and strengthen the faith of the hearers; and these miracles as written in the Scriptures are meant to have this confirming and strengthening effect for the church of all times. In general, miracles as accompanying the preaching of the Lord and His apostles ceased when the process of the revelation of His Word came to an end.

¹ Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, (1912) 1962, p.48.

² It is not the place here to go into the text-critical problem of Mk.16:9-20; and we cannot give a full explanation of these verses 17-18, but confine ourselves to some relevant remarks.

5). Method of mission work regarding location and duration

Must missionaries work with the method Paul used in choosing locations for his preaching and teaching; and in the duration of their work in these locations? Roland Allen is convinced that the method of Paul should be taken not as just descriptive but also quite prescriptive.¹ He concludes from the way Luke writes his account of Paul's journeys that Paul focussed on reaching the people in provinces through his work in the big city centres in those provinces. The congregations in the centres would spread the light of Christ throughout the entire province (12-13). This appears correct. For Paul's stay of three months and two years first in Ephesus resulted in all the residents of the province of Asia hearing the word of the Lord (Ac.19:8-10). After a brief intermission with a trip to Corinth and possibly Crete, Paul stayed in the province of Asia for another brief period.² Likewise, the year and six (or seven?) months (Ac.18:11 and 18) of work in Corinth reached also many around the city (1Cor.1:2; 2Cor.1:2).

It is helpful to give here a brief overview of Paul's three missionary journeys as described in Ac.13-20. The first journey took place from c. 43/44-46/47 A.D. It was from Antioch via Cyprus and Perga to Pisidian Antioch; then to Iconium and Lystra and to Derbe. From here they travelled the same route back, strengthening the believers and appointing elders in every church (14:22-23), up to Perga where they preached, too. From there they went back to Antioch in Syria, the sending church.

All this travelling and preaching took place in roughly three years. Churches were established, probably also on Cyprus, because Barnabas and John (Mark) returned to this island after the separation of Paul and Barnabas (Ac.15:39). But certainly in Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and then in Perga: Five churches, with possibly two more (Cyprus), and all the travelling on foot, makes a blessed result. This is, including the travelling, an average of five to seven (including Cyprus) months of work per church. With the travelling here included, this probably means a time of less than three to five months of work per congregation on average for establishing these churches and for appointing elders.

The second journey took place from c. 48 to 51, about four years, of which a year and six to seven month was spent in Corinth. From Antioch the trip (on foot) went north, via Tarsus, and then west to Derbe and Lystra (Timothy taken along), through the region of Phrygia and Galatia to Troas, and then over sea to Macedonia, to Philippi, "a leading city". And from Philippi, the journey continued to Thessalonica, and via Berea to Athens, and from there to Corinth. Paul returned over sea, via Ephesus, Caesarea and Jerusalem, to Antioch (Ac.18:18-22). The trip from Antioch to Troas is a distance of more than a thousand kilometres through often very rough, difficult, mountainous terrain (present day Turkey). At Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens (house congregation?), and Corinth, churches were established. Four years (c.48 to 51) minus one and a half year in Corinth, and more than a year, probably, of travelling, leaves probably less than one year for instituting churches in Philippi (brief), Thessalonica (brief), Berea, and Athens (brief).

¹ Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods*, pp.10-17.

² J. van Bruggen, *Paulus: Pionier voor de Messias van Israel* (Paul: Pioneer for the Messiah of Israel), Kampen: Kok, 2001; pp.88-91, 264.

The third journey, from the Fall of 51 to 58, started again from Antioch. Its first part was used “to strengthen the brothers,” going “from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia” (Ac.18:23), till Paul arrived at Ephesus (Ac.19:1) in the Spring of 53, about a year and a half after his departure from Antioch. The apostle worked in Ephesus, first during three months and two years (Ac.19:8-10). In 55, he interrupted the work in Ephesus for a trip through Macedonia and to Corinth, and then spent an additional shorter period in Ephesus (Ac.19:22). After the riot, Paul travelled to Macedonia, again encouraging the brothers, and then went to Greece, where he spent three months, Spring 57, perhaps up to Illyricum (Rm.15:19). Finally, in the winter of 57/58 he returned to Jerusalem.¹ This third journey is time-wise used for re-visiting existing churches, while it speaks of a period of about three years of work in (and around) Ephesus, the longest time at one place, in the period as described in Ac.13-20.

The conclusion is that the time for establishing churches in city centres was generally quite short, with the longest period in Ephesus: about three years. In these brief periods also elders (and deacons(?), Phlp.1:1) were appointed. Now the question is: does our mission work today have to follow this same pattern of staying as briefly as possible on one post and move to the next quickly; while appointing elders (and deacons) within these short periods? Is Paul’s method prescriptive?

In my opinion, this is not the case. Paul worked in a unique situation. He did not have to preach in a cross-cultural situation. He preached and taught in the same basic culture in which he grew up, the culturally Hellenistic-Roman empire. In almost every place there were Jewish settlements with a synagogue, or at least a ‘place for prayer’. It is important to see that Paul began with his preaching and teaching in the synagogues. He found believers in the LORD God of Israel, Jews and often proselytes, all people well-acquainted with God’s revelation in the Old Testament Scriptures.

As for himself, the change from reading the Old Testament in a typical Jewish way to reading it in the light of Christ Jesus as the Messiah, was not very difficult, once he was converted to the faith in Christ. The same must have been the case for other Jewish and Gentile believers in the LORD. Here the period of “catechetical instruction in the faith” could be very brief.

Since there were knowledgeable men among the converts, it was also not difficult to quickly find persons competent and adequate for the office of elder. From Acts and the epistles, we have the impression that, although there were believers not in high esteem with the higher classes in society (1Cor.1:26-29), quite a number most likely belonged to the educated middle class. Paul addresses slaves and masters.

In contrast with this, foreign mission today is often still very much a cross-cultural endeavour, with the receiving culture being (quite) ‘primitive’. No doubt, it must be acknowledged that not all ‘foreign’ cultures are the same. For instance, the Chinese culture differed/differs from the Papuan culture. And it can make a difference from which class people come. But it is clear that a Chinese and a Brazilian of the poorer classes, and a Papuan need much more and longer instruction to understand the gospel of Christ, the Christ of the Scriptures. This counts also for the training of office bearers. It will need a much longer time than Paul needed. In many modern mission situations, the building of faith also through an increase in knowledge 2Pt.1:2 has to begin “from scratch. It seems to me that these things make it evident

¹ J.Van Bruggen, *Paul*, idem.

that the Paul's method of speedy institution within a period of building that lasts from, let us say, some six months to three years will not work in the modern situation of Brazil or Papua, and probably not even in the present western world. Longer periods of training appear needed. The situation in the first century was unique.

6). Other points of importance

There is the matter of the relation between sending church and her missionary or missionaries. Also here caution is needed. After the apostolic period, missionaries are no longer apostles in the strict sense of the word, and do not have the authority of the apostles. It is significant that we see how the apostle Peter gives a report to the Jerusalem church after he proclaimed the gospel to Cornelius (Ac.11). And we see Paul give an account to the church at Antioch after the first and second journey (Ac.14:25-28; 18:22), not after the third. Paul reported to the church at Jerusalem, too. He did this after all three missionary journeys (Ac.15; 18:22 [from Caesarea he "went up", namely to Jerusalem, and then "went down to Antioch"], 21:15). It is good that missionaries are accountable to their sending church council. It is also good that the council is wise in realizing the geographical and cultural distance between sending church and mission post/congregation.

This relation between the sending church and the young mission congregation is another point. What is the (spiritual) authority of the sending church over the mission church, and how long is such a relation there? When does the young church become independent? Acts does not show authority of Antioch over the churches established by Paul. There is the authoritative doctrinal decision of the church in Jerusalem for the gentile churches (Ac.15). But this, too, can hardly be taken as rule for the relation between sending church and mission church. For Jerusalem was the church of the apostles, so that the doctrinal decision was very much an apostolic decision. Now all churches everywhere are under the authority of Christ, which means, under the authority of the Word of God that came to us through prophets and apostles, for which reason the churches adopted their confessions to remain faithful to the Word of Christ and, in this way, to Christ Himself.

Then there is the matter of financial support from the established (rich?) sending church to the (poor?) mission church(es). Acts does not speak about such support. On the contrary, it appears from the New Testament that the newly instituted churches were financially independent. It seems, therefore, difficult to come with biblical rules on this point, apart from the general commandment that, like individual members, so also churches are to help each other (e.g. 2Cor.8-9). Mission history has made it clear that great caution and much wisdom is needed on this point of financial support.

Other matters could be mentioned, but this is not needed. It is evident that the methodology of mission work as described in the book of Acts and as indicated in the Epistles of the Apostles is done in the unique political, cultural and religious situation of the apostles of Christ. Therefore, we have to be cautious with claiming biblical norms for our methodology under often totally different circumstances. It remains humble and wise, though, to listen to God's Word always to guide us also in our methodology.

Conclusion

Our conclusion with regard to the points mentioned here is that regarding the contents of the gospel message there is definitely the biblical norm for all Christian doctrine. That has to be maintained. The full and complete doctrine must be proclaimed as it is found in the Scriptures of both the Old and the New Testament. We are not allowed to add to it or to take away from it.

This normative requirement regarding the message determines also the requirements for the messengers. This was Paul's charge to Timothy himself and for Timothy in his task of the training of the next generation of leading preachers-teachers. They must be faithful, reliable, and gifted, as well as competent and qualified. The gospel must be safe in their hands. And this requirement remains throughout the generations, just as the gospel, the living and abiding Word of God itself.

However, with regard to the methodology of the mission work in its different aspects, there is a measure of freedom. There is not a strict binding to the methodology of the Scriptures here. However, we found it to be wise to seriously study and consider the wisdom of the apostles, under the guidance of the Spirit, in their own cultural and social situation. But it is also wise to take into consideration the concrete situation on the different mission fields.

In the end, it is still Christ Jesus, our Lord, who does the work. He gathers and He builds His church out of all the nations through His Spirit and Word, based on His blood. He calls and forms the human messengers for church and mission field. For both counts: "the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Mt.9:37-38).

The Melanesian Marathon: Preaching Beneath A Blue Canvas
Stephen 't Hart

Introduction

Harried and hurried, Sister Kemi Asi made her way to the “Blue Canvas Church,” where a white missionary had recently begun to hold worship services. She was late again and her mind was still reeling with all that had happened that morning. Her baby Inoa that she was carrying in a string bag on her back had been sick all night, with high fevers and vomiting. No doubt this was due to the fight she had had with her sister-in-law, but now what could be done so that baby Inoa would get better again?

It did not help Kemi that her husband wasn't pulling his weight. There had been gossip, too, that her husband had been seen with a young lady from the neighbouring village. Now that girl's father was demanding compensation and was threatening to burn down Kemi's house. And her husband was too ashamed to show his face anymore. And if that wasn't bad enough, yesterday's rain was so heavy that it destroyed two thirds of her peanut crop. What could she do? Perhaps going to church would help her ...

The sun was out and hot, but the ground was still muddy from yesterday's downpour. There was no room left under the blue canvas, so she found a piece of shade under a tree close by. She was happy to be there.

After singing a number of songs with words and tunes that were unfamiliar to her, the preacher opened his Bible and began to read. She could not read along: she did not own a Bible, nor was she literate.

Then the preaching began. Kemi could not understand it all. Her baby Inoa was fussing and needed to be nursed. A few dogs had invaded the “Blue Canvas” and yelped like stuck pigs when a man got up and kicked them away. Then some kids had started whispering and giggling together. Then a truck had roared into the village. In between all this, she heard something about a man called Elijah, a widow, flour that never ran out and a son that came to life. Then the hot sun and the drone of the preacher's voice began to have a hypnotic effect on her and her eyes just would not stay open anymore.

But she did hear some of the message. She was struck at the power that this man Elijah had. How could Elijah get his God to stop the flour from running out? She listened intently and took note of both the words Elijah spoke and how he stretched himself on the body of the widow's son three times, no doubt blowing on him as he did so. The power of Elijah was amazing. Perhaps this missionary too had some of that power. Perhaps if she kept coming to him and these services she could share in it and her problems would be resolved. Yes, Kemi Asi would try to be back next week.

The missionary, meanwhile, returned home happy. Sure it was frustrating that some people like that new lady Kemi what-ever-her-name-is came late. The distractions also affected his delivery. The singing was almost a solo on his part – but that was necessary because these people did not know any songs. It had frustrated him that almost all the songs composed and sung in Papua New Guinea spoke about the blood of Jesus or the Holy Spirit's fire. Oh, and a few about Jesus being the King. Lots of repetition, too. That is why he stuck with those old English hymns that had been translated into the local trade language. But he was happy with the turn-out. Church attendance had grown steadily over the last few weeks. And people seemed to

listen to and understand his message. Especially that part about Elijah praying and the Lord bringing the widow's son back to life. The people were clearly beginning to understand the nature of God and the power of His Word. Hopefully over time they would learn even more about God, their lives would be transformed so that they would act as Christians also on Monday to Saturday.

That story was fictitious but I think it does paint a realistic situation. It is a picture of a preacher who is failing to connect with the people and the message of the Gospel is being distorted.

While we firmly believe it is the Holy Spirit who works faith, even through preaching that is filled with weaknesses, the missionary needs to preach in such a way that the whole counsel and will of God is communicated as clearly and fully as possible. In order to do this effectively, the missionary needs to go beyond expressing theological truths in a vacuum. He needs to preach in such a way that the congregation is challenged to embrace a new, biblical worldview. Furthermore while the gospel is being proclaimed, distractions, or static, need to be minimized where possible so that the congregation is able to hear, perceive and believe the message being preached. These are the topics I wish to address this morning.

Preaching to Transform A Worldview

When we speak of a "worldview," we are in a sense dealing with something that does not exist in a complete and static sense. A worldview is defined by the Webster's Dictionary as "a comprehensive, especially personal, philosophy or conception of the world and of human life." Religious beliefs, personal experiences and societal norms all impact an individual's worldview, and this worldview remains in constant flux to a greater or lesser extent. Nevertheless, it is helpful to attempt to take a snapshot of this worldview from time to time. It is also helpful to consider trends or beliefs that certain cultures or people hold in common – provided that we understand that these trends or beliefs are also in flux. And just as a pink Band-Aid is considered skin-color even though it does not match the color of any one person's skin, so cultural worldviews can be considered generic for certain nations or people's groups even though this worldview does not fully match any one person.

As with many of the world's tribal cultures, the people in Papua New Guinea have embraced Christianity. Many are deeply committed and attend church faithfully every Sunday. Nevertheless while the gospel is considered necessary for eternal salvation, the vast majority of Papuans do not live in the conscious awareness that Christ is Lord of all their lives. These same people who attend church on Sunday will visit the witchdoctor on Monday, or at least firmly believe in the power of witchcraft and that they are somewhat impoverished if they give that up for Christianity.

An underlying problem for many Papuans is that they do not comprehend how their faith in God can help them in their daily struggles. They also tend to read and understand the Scriptures through their cultural glasses, on the basis of their traditional worldview. This leads to syncretism or what Paul Hiebert calls "split-level Christianity."¹ The preaching therefore needs to address the underlying assumptions of the Melanesian worldview and answer the questions raised by it. In order to do this, the missionary first needs to understand the basic

¹ Paul Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw & Tite Tienou in Understanding Folk Religion 1999, Baker Book House: Grand Rapids. P15.

assumptions and worldview of the Western world of which he is a product. He then needs to understand the basic assumptions and worldview of the Melanesian. Then he needs to critically assess both worldviews in the light of Scripture. It is only then that he is able to preach under the “Blue Canvas” in a relevant way that speaks to the heart of the listener and challenges him or her to a life-transforming relationship with Jesus Christ.

The Missionary’s Worldview

Today’s Western missionary can not help but be influenced by the cultural values and presuppositions he grew up with. Here are a few of them:

1. The Renaissance gave us a Neo-platonic worldview that has drawn a sharp distinction between the spiritual and the physical. Ideas of God, Satan, heaven, hell, sin and salvation are placed in the spiritual sphere, but science seeks to explain all else in terms of autonomous, natural laws. Three examples:

A. The drought PNG experienced in 1997 was caused by El Nino, a hot spot in the Pacific Ocean. In itself El Nino can not be fully explained *yet*, but it can be measured. The answer is for the people of PNG to buy water pumps and irrigate.

B. A truck accident in February 2004 that caused the death of 22 people from the villages in the area we minister in was caused by a dangerous road as well as a truck that was overloaded, had no brakes and faulty gears. In short it was an accident waiting to happen. Better safety procedures will prevent this tragedy from happening again.

C. Children get sick from malaria. Medicine is the cure. Who caused the disease or why the child got sick is not an issue.

The problem with this dualistic worldview is that the sovereignty of God is undermined. Angels and demons are ignored and God is no longer acknowledged. Too much confidence is placed in human abilities and science is believed to give the answers to our questions. One of the results of this in our churches is a weak prayer life. There is no sense of urgency or expectancy in many of our prayers. We make our decisions on the basis of budgets and well-reasoned deliberations. It is almost as an after-thought that we ask God to bless the decisions we’ve already made.

2. Hard work and careful planning will ensure success. This is the age of financial advisers and insurance companies. The goal in life is instant self gratification. Happiness is found in being pampered in a luxury resort, having a mud bath at the local spa, retiring at age 55.

Some problems with this is that man has become a god here and the human self is glorified rather than the Lord of heaven and earth. We work for ourselves, not the Lord and the Cultural Mandate becomes equated with a growing economy and an improvement in the standard of living for the individual in question. Our focus, also in our theology becomes present-day oriented and we lose our focus on the last day and the consummation of this world. Neither the preaching nor our prayers earnestly cry out to God for that last day to come quickly. In our mission work we assume that physical riches will make the people more spiritual. Another problem is that Western Christians generally fail to understand the place of suffering in our lives.

3. The self-worth of the individual. The individual is more important than the group. He is encouraged to find his niche and excel in it. Competition is healthy. The individual is expected to sell himself to his employer or to others, proving why he should be chosen above others. Further, human freedom of speech, movement and action as well as democracy are considered inalienable human rights.

There are many problems with this. Religion becomes an individual concern with all the emphasis placed on the personal decision for Christ. The horizontal element of the covenant relationship is belittled. We fail to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.. This causes both families and churches to fragment. The rights of the individual are trumpeted over the good of the group, even over the clear teachings of Scripture. The doctrine of total depravity as well as original sin is threatened.

The Melanesian Worldview

Much of the Western worldview is inherently unbiblical and it rejects the sovereignty of God, the lordship of Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, so does the Melanesian worldview. A few points:

1. There is no such thing as a distinction between the spiritual and physical worlds. Events such as failures, disasters, sickness and death, as well as success, prosperity and health are caused by spiritual forces, ancestors and the use of magic. There is little real interest in the study of science. The spiritual world can be manipulated to ensure good or to cause evil. Some examples:
 - A. A drought, flood or a garden that grows poorly is the result of an imbalance in the spirit world. Ultimately it was not El Nino that caused a drought but a failure of the populace to follow the correct rituals when building their gardens.
 - B. A truck accident in February 2004 caused 22 people to die. The issue was not a dangerous road, an overloaded vehicle, no brakes and a faulty gear mechanism. For this driver had driven like this hundreds of times before. It was witchcraft that did it. Therefore close attention needed to be taken to markings on the bodies of the deceased and any perceived unusual events that surrounded the whole event.
 - C. The greatest felt need is not to find forgiveness or even meaning in life, but to find protection from those who would cause harm to others. Whereas Christianity explains where the dead have ultimately gone, this is not the core issue for the Melanesian. His question is how does this death confront the living? Since this death was caused by someone who wished him harm, who was this person and how can the rest of the family clan be protected from the evil intentions of this person.
 - D. A child is sick with malaria. This is a common event and so normally a trip to the local medical clinic is sufficient. However if, for example the mother had been fighting with her sister-in-law, this would clearly be the cause of this illness and so this matter would need to be resolved first. If not the illness would return.

A basic problem with this worldview is that too much power and authority is given to unseen spirits and forces in this world, while the power and presence of God is not acknowledged. In our preaching we need to preach the sovereign King of Kings. The God of creation is all powerful and yet approachable and caring. He is the One who controls all things and He is not to be manipulated but worshipped. A clear teaching of the Fall into sin and the implications of this needs to be taught. The earth is groaning as in bondage to decay and we too eagerly look forward to the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8:20-23.)

When our sermons deal with witchcraft, as they must do on a regular basis, the preacher must take it seriously. Denying the presence of witchcraft is not the answer, nor is it the biblical answer. However we must preach that God's power is greater than any other power and can deliver us even from the most terrible curse, yes even the curse of death itself. The evils of witchcraft, including the lies and deception must be exposed. In addition the fruits of the Spirit must be promoted, for jealousy and hostilities will cause witchcraft to be a continuing concern.

2. Success can be ensured through the use of magic. Through magic the spiritual world is coerced to do the bidding of the who is doing or for whom the magic is being done. Charms, spells, magical formulas are used in magic, as well as certain leaves, stones and especially items belonging to the person on whom the magic is performed. Some examples.

A. When the young men wish to play Rugby or another sport, they will ask a friendly witchdoctor to ensure their success. Each player would wear a lucky charm, and this is what would cause their team to win.

B. Magic is performed to ensure a good crop or to break a previously cast spell. In a village where some of our church members live, the betel nut trees developed a disease. One family called in a local witch-doctor who through his magic healed their trees. The church family decided against this practice, and their trees died.

C. Magic is connected to things, especially those of a spiritual nature. A man who used a page from a Bible to roll a cigarette went insane. A Roman Catholic who threw an image of Mary into the ocean caused the Aitape Tsunami in PNG back in 1997. Modern witchdoctors make use of the Bible (for example using it as a pillow) and also the name of Jesus.

Our preaching must stress that it is God alone who can bless. Life must flow out of our relationship with Him. He will guide us through His Spirit and Word and protect us in His providential care. The gospel offers so much more than health and success on earth; it gives us true and lasting peace with God. We must also be careful that Christianity is not seen as a higher (or lower) form of magic. Our prayers are not magical formulas and it is not as though God hears us on the basis of how good our prayers sound, or if the one praying is a pastor or not. The purpose of suffering also needs to be explored. We must entrust ourselves to the care of the God of righteousness and love.

3. Traditionally, Melanesians find meaning in the group. Uncles are called and treated as fathers, cousins are called brothers and sisters. Each village and each tribe considers itself inherently better than any other. To be a part of the group means life; to be cut off from it, the land and the ancestors is to be as good as dead. The community must remain in balance, in harmony and peace. Sin is that which adversely affects the group. Criticism and gossip are used to shame the

individual and so keep him or her in line. To resolve a dispute or negotiate a settlement, all the relevant members of the clan are expected to come together. The issue would be discussed until a mutual resolution would be reached. Salvation here is seen as the restoration of right relationships among all members of the community. Democratic voting in such a setting is unheard of. Personal ambition is often seen as harmful to the group and such a person would be pulled down for his perceived greed.

In our preaching we must focus on man being created in the image of God. As God's image bearer he is called to reach his full potential. However he may never do that at the expense of his neighbour. The Christian is part of a new community which has Christ as its head. Christians are called to minister to one another. A good working diaconate that is based not on money but on calling Christians to show love and concern for each other, to pray and care for each other is necessary. In this context we must preach that Christians ought to be good stewards of God's creation and share with those in need.

Reducing the Static

Even if the missionary could fully understand his own cultural presuppositions, the Melanesian worldview and the Biblical worldview he is called to preach, he must still deal with that other hindrance to his Melanesian audience understanding the message: the disturbances, noise or static that prevent the Melanesian from fully understanding what is being preached. I would define disturbances or static here as "anything that causes disruption to the message being communicated." Just as a missionary can never remove all static from his radio, so he can never eradicate all static so that his preaching is clearly understood. However he can do *something*.

1. The worship facilities. A building does not make a church and in the Melanesian context it is often best to start with little more than a Blue Canvas. It is preferable, however, for the newly formed congregation to build a simple but adequate structure as soon as practicable. If the congregation can be seated in one location where it is relatively cool, and there is a simple wall to keep out the dogs and pigs and keep the kids in, there will be a greater sense of community and the people would be more inclined to listen attentively to the preaching. In addition to this, the smaller the group the closer the preacher needs to be to his congregation. A large pulpit or table can be a barrier between the preacher and the congregation.
2. Order in the worship service. A clear and simple liturgy can assist the people in being ready to listen attentively to the preaching. The children who are present can be trained to keep their disturbances to a minimum. This can be addressed in the Sunday School classes.
3. Get there early. If the missionary arrives on time, he can mingle with the people and find out how things are going in the village or settlement. If there was a fight, a death, an illness or concerns over floods, droughts, access to water etc, he could learn about this. This could then be addressed in the prayers and also, if possible, the sermon. The missionary also needs to take the time to develop relationships with those he is preaching to.
4. Present a message that is geared to the level of understanding of the people. Especially at the beginning, focus on the daily needs and concerns of the people and declare from the Scriptures how deliverance and life itself are to be found in Christ. Teach the people who God is, how Christ conquered sin and the devil and how we receive new life in Him. Focus

on our calling to worship God. I continue to believe that a chronological approach to Bible teaching is helpful especially for those who are new to the faith. If this can not be done in the preaching, it can still be done in other lessons.

5. **Setting the mood.** Although we tend to get very nervous when people speak of appealing to the emotions, I believe that the whole heart, soul and mind needs to be involved in worship and in listening to the sermon. Through the singing of biblically and culturally appropriate psalms and hymns, as well as prayer and Scripture reading, the congregation can become prepared to put aside their daily cares and focus on the proclamation of the Scriptures. The congregation needs to be able to appreciate what it means to worship a God who is majestic in holiness and awesome in glory. It is only then that their hearts will be open to receive the preaching.
6. **The language.** There is a higher diversity of languages in Melanesia than in any other part of the world. In most church groups in PNG we have people from various language groups. The preaching is generally done in the trade language. This could be the second or even the third language for the congregation member. The missionary needs to be extremely fluent in this language and his accent should be minimized as much as possible. If a translator must be used, it would be best if the missionary could practice with him the day before. Key words could be translated impromptu during the service.
7. **A preaching style that works in a Melanesian context.** As much as is possible, the missionary needs to *speak* to the congregation rather than read the message. Since the Melanesian culture is an oral culture, the use of story-telling is very important. The sermon should make use of stories, illustrations and parables to impart the message. The sermons themselves must remain Christ-centred with a focus on the freedom we have in Christ.

Conclusion

The next Sunday, Kemi Asi was in church again as she had planned. Her relationship with her sister-in-law had not yet improved. Her baby Inoa was doing a little better, however. As she went down to the Blue Canvas, she was troubled. That morning there had been a big argument over access to the small stream where everyone went to bathe. It put a bad taste in her mouth and gave both her and the others in the church a bit of a heavy heart.

But before the service began, one of the local men led them in singing from hymns that she knew off by heart, also songs in her tribal language. As she clapped her hands and sang, something began to stir in her heart. And then everyone stopped to pray and ask the Lord to bless them in the worship service and to put all things of this world to the side. The struggles in the village, including the trouble that morning were brought before the Lord, and Kemi felt as though a great load began to slide from her shoulders.

Then the missionary began to preach. He was animated and told them an awesome story about Elijah, prophets of Baal and how the Lord sent fire from heaven to burn up an offering. He was telling it like a story, and Kemi sat enthralled, listening to every word. And as the missionary was explaining that power encounter between the LORD and the prophets of Baal, suddenly she began to see God in a different light. She began to see Him as a God who was involved with the world. As a God who was concerned with *her*, who could help her with her problems. And even more, she began to understand that this sovereign Lord had conquered the

Evil One. That Christ had come to rescue also Kemi Asi from the dominion of Satan and his spirit world. What an awesome God to serve!

The preaching was over. A couple of young men stood up and took their battered guitars. And with one accord everyone, young and old, literate and illiterate, opened their mouths and lustily sang a locally produced song:

Stand up and profess the King Jesus!
Power and glory belongs to You alone, Jesus!
You are the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
Let us rise and praise Him!

Exalt Him! Exalt Him and lift up His name!
Lift up your praises on high
To Jesus Immanuel.

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*Preaching Christ to the Babine: A Case Study in
Cross-Cultural Communication of the Gospel*
Wes Bredenhof

Introduction

I'd like to begin by saying that I am very thankful that we can have this conference. In 2002, some of us first discussed the possibility of organizing such a conference. In consultation with our other missionary colleagues we were hoping to have such an event in 2003 or 2004. However, for various reasons it never came to pass. So, I'm very grateful that Dr. DeVisser and Prof. Geertsema have taken the initiative to put something together.

For myself, it comes at a time of transition in my ministry. I am no longer a missionary in Fort Babine. Due to family circumstances, I requested that the Smithers church make me available for call. This they did and I eventually accepted a call to serve as a co-pastor in the Langley church. Nevertheless, my heart is still very much with mission. It seems that you can never take the mission spirit out of someone who has served as a missionary.

Before I was called to be the missionary for Smithers, I had the experience of doing a summer internship with my immediate predecessor, brother Hilco DeHaan. Hilco taught me a lot of things, but one of the most important lessons I learned from him was the value of the social sciences for mission. He had been educated in the Netherlands in development geography. He had read and studied extensively in native studies and anthropology. Hilco was well-equipped to be a missionary among the native people in the area around Smithers. And his passion was contagious.

In 2000, I received and accepted the call to take Hilco's place and continue the work. The church in Smithers decided to initially post our family in Fort Babine. Our first three months were spent in an evaluation of the community as a potential mission field. Eventually, the decision was made by the church to post us there permanently.

When this decision was made, one of my first priorities was to continue to study the community and its culture. Hilco had impressed upon me an initial understanding of how different indigenous cultures are from our own – and from each other. For instance, there would be common cultural elements between the Wet'suwet'en in Moricetown and the Babine, but there would also be some significant differences. The same holds true for the Babine as a people group living in Canada. Up until about 25 years ago, they had been relatively isolated from the mainstream of Canadian society. The coming of electricity and a road into the village has brought more proximity to the mainstream – but yet there remains a distinct culture in Fort Babine. With this cross-cultural dynamic, it was clear that effective preaching of the gospel would require careful cultural study.

Through my readings in missiology, I discovered that communication is far more than the words that we speak. This is one of those areas where I believe that the social sciences,

especially anthropology, have a lot to offer us as missionaries. Their value is mostly observational, giving us data and information. Cultural anthropology goes further in giving us helpful tools by which we can classify and analyze cultures. From there, it can also help us in shaping communication strategies.

Applying those insights in Fort Babine, we were working with the Babine people – a traditionally tribal culture. According to David Hesselgrave, many tribal peoples exhibit “concrete relational thinking.” These are people “who attempt to discover truth in such a way that life and reality are seen pictorially in terms of the active emotional relationships present in a concrete situation. In verbal communication, the concrete relational thinker tends to express, inform, and persuade by referring to symbols, stories, events, objects and so forth, rather than to general propositions and principles. But he is especially prone to rely on non-verbal communication of all types – gesture and sign language, music and the plastic arts, ritual and drama, and image projection.”¹ Among tribal cultures, one will find a wide variety of myths, parables, aphorisms, fables, analogies, similes and stories. Tribal peoples often find Christianity to be “too deep, too dogmatic, too definite, and too difficult. It is too abstract, too ideological, too conceptual, too formalistic, too unnatural and too unfeeling.”²

Hesselgrave opened my eyes to what we were dealing with in Fort Babine. The Babine were definitely concrete relational in their thinking. It was for this reason that Roman Catholicism, a religion of the eyes, seems to have appealed to them so strongly in years gone by. It was also for this reason that Pentecostal and charismatic forms of Christianity quickly found acceptance. Feel-good music and emotional religious highs appeal strongly to the Babine. In the end, this presents a challenge for a Reformed missionary, whose emphasis is on the proclamation of the Word. The Reformed faith, the Biblical faith, is a religion of the Word, a religion of the ears. As an additional challenge, we have tended to be relatively abstract in our preaching style in the established churches.

Traditionally, Babine culture was somewhat oriented to the spoken word. Potlatch feasts would feature long speeches. Elders and hereditary chiefs have been known to talk for hours, telling stories and passing on the received wisdom. In their speaking, the Babine would be very concrete and vivid. Nevertheless, today this feature of Babine culture is nearly lost. When elders and hereditary chiefs make long speeches today, the attention span is typically gone within 15-20 minutes – and this is with a concrete, vivid use of language. For a good number of Babine, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, the long term effects of substance abuse, and possibly the influence of television, have combined to reduce attention spans dramatically.

An additional challenge was in the area of language. Fort Babine is a small community of approximately 100 year round residents. 38% of them have Babine as their first language, 57% have English, with the remainder having a variety of other local languages. As a percentage, the number of Babine speakers is relatively high. Most native

¹ *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Missionary Communication* (Second Edition), David J. Hesselgrave, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991, p.325.

² *Ibid.*, p.332.

communities in Canada do not have nearly that many indigenous language speakers.¹ However, almost all the residents of Fort Babine speak English to some degree of proficiency. The English spoken there has a reduced vocabulary, inconsistent grammar, and peculiar idioms, defined not only by local usage but also by the influence of television.

During my summer with Hilco, I had taken a university course on the Wet'suwet'en language, a close relative of Babine. Through that, I had developed a superficial understanding of this complex language. For the period of my missionary service, I made several efforts to get people to teach me the language to a greater degree of proficiency, including offering payment for their services. However, these efforts were not welcomed and so I had a difficult time in furthering my knowledge. I suspect that the people wanted to maintain their language as the final barrier between me and them.

At any rate, the problem I faced in communicating Christ to the Babine was not a problem of exegesis. I stand by the position that, within the means available, a missionary should be just as responsible with his exegesis as a minister in an established church. So, having done the work with a text, the problem was in communicating the message of that text in an effective way so that my listeners would see and hear the Christ of the Scriptures. In other words, the problem was one of homiletics. At this point, I'd like to go through some of the aspects of this area that challenged me as missionary.

Text Choice

Text choice falls at the very front of the homiletical challenge.² We often choose a text because we think it will address some need that we see with our listeners – though sometimes exegesis proves us wrong! In my first year of preaching on the mission field, I took a survey approach to the Bible. I covered the history of salvation in the Old Testament in approximately 20 sermons – I was being very selective! Following this survey, I preached a number of series of sermons from different books that I thought would address the needs of my listeners. For instance, I preached through Ephesians as a means to teach the doctrines of grace to those who had grown up Roman Catholic and later fallen under the influence of charismatic Pentecostalism. I preached through James to address certain lifestyle issues I observed. I also preached through Jonah, Ruth, Mark and Acts in an effort to preach Christ to concrete relational thinkers. I believed these narrative passages might be more effective in communicating the gospel.

¹ In 1991, the reported figure for on-reserve registered Indians was 29.5%. Cf. "First Nation Cultures and Communities: Editor's Introduction to Part 3," J. Rick Ponting, in *First Nations in Canada: Perspectives on Opportunity, Empowerment and Self-Determination*, J. Rick Ponting, Toronto, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1997. p.251.

² For instance, T. Hoekstra included text-choice as a chapter in *Gereformeerde Homiletiek*, (Wageningen: Gebr. Zomer & Keuning's Uitgevermaatschappij, n.d.), pp.236-280.

Sermon Structure

Another area that presented a challenge was that of sermon structure. I was trained here at the College to think in terms of Introduction, statement of theme and division, each point (make sure they're clearly announced and drink some water at the same time), and then the conclusion. It was a very linear, logical arrangement for the sermon and it was readily apparent to the congregation. Preachers could use their creative skills in crafting clever, and hopefully memorable, themes and divisions.

When I first began preaching on the mission field, I used the structure that I was taught and followed the same method used in the churches for presentation. However, I quickly found that this was artificial. It did not work with the Babine. It seemed to alienate them from the message – it seemed stilted and out of place. After about a year of preaching, I abandoned it completely. That's not to say that I abandoned structure in my sermon. To be sure, I *wanted* to abandon the style of structure that I was taught as part of our culture. But I wasn't sure exactly how to structure my sermons in a more culturally appropriate way. So, the old Western structure remained, but it became invisible. I had a theme and division for every sermon, but I no longer announced it during the sermon. I did publish it in the bulletin, however; and I still had an introduction and a conclusion, but it was not always clear where the introduction ended and the main body began. Everything flowed seamlessly. And that seemed to be fine with the listeners, at least in so far as I could get any feedback from them.

Redemptive-Historical Preaching

I came to the mission field firmly convicted as a redemptive-historical preacher. I left feeling the same way. But this was always a difficult point for me in preparing my sermons. Especially as I developed more of an understanding of the Babine culture, I wanted to preach narrative passages as much as possible. But it is precisely these passages that present more difficulty in preaching Christ, especially Old Testament narratives. The difficulty is there in all our established churches as well, but it becomes more acute with a missionary who has to be sensitive to sermon length and the capacities of his listeners. In an established church, we have about 30-40 minutes to draw everything out – usually plenty of time to make all the Christological connections in a responsible way. In Fort Babine, 20 minutes would be stretching the attention span of the listeners.

In the end, I had to work out a higher degree of efficiency with the development of my sermons. The development had to be simple and comprehensible, but at the same time efficient. In a sermon on an Old Testament passage, I would spend about 10 minutes explaining the text, perhaps 5 minutes developing the Christology, and then maybe another 5 minutes working out the application from the Christology. Now I could have skipped the Christology and moved right to application, but would I then have been preaching Christ, or mere moralism? Being a Reformed preacher does bring added challenges to the mission field!

Illustrative Material

When preparing my sermons, I always made an effort to incorporate word pictures that came from the world of my listeners. I would use images taking from hunting and fishing. I would speak of the mountains and rivers, Babine Lake and other natural features. I would try to incorporate elements of their culture. For instance, in one text there was a mention of sackcloth and ashes. I likened this to the black clothing that Babine widows wear for one year after the death of their husbands – it's a visible sign of grief and sorrow.

In other instances, I tried to incorporate Babine proverbs. This was something that I was especially working on during the last year. I was stimulated in this direction by an article in the April 2004 issue of *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*.¹ Jay Moon wrote about using proverbs in ministry in an African context. He also gave some practical tips for finding and using proverbs effectively. So, I followed his advice and was slowly picking up some of the Babine aphorisms and proverbs – and these provided a clearer window into their culture and a means to be more effective in communicating the gospel in my sermons. Again, I was only making a beginning of this – if I'd been able to stay on in Fort Babine, I'm sure I would have gained even more insights.

Application

I already mentioned that I tried to develop my application out of my Christology. It tended to be subtle and less direct than I would have done elsewhere. Though they could be quite forthright with one another, it seemed to be socially unacceptable for an outsider to be very direct. So, I was patient and bided my time. I believed the time would come when I could be more direct. The subtleties, however, were not unnoticed. The Babine pick up on subtle messages quite easily. Because of certain taboos, it was necessary to use coded language when dealing with certain subjects, especially in regard to sexuality. This coded language, these special idioms, took some time to learn. Finally, as far as word choice in application went, it was always better to use the first person plural “we” than the more confrontational second person “you.”

Preaching to ESL Speakers

A final point is in regards to preaching to those who speak English as a second language. I was born and raised with the English language – it is second nature to me. I read extensively and have a large vocabulary that I can draw on when I speak or write. But in Fort Babine these things could be a hindrance rather than an asset. And I had to preach in English. The people wanted me to preach in English. This was understandable: if I had begun preaching in Babine, 57% of the people would probably understand very little. But there were still the other 38% who had Babine as their first language. Moreover, all the people in our core group fit into that last category. So, we were mostly working in an English as a Second Language or ESL situation.

¹ “Sweet Talk in Africa: Using Proverbs in Ministry,” Jay Moon, *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* April 2004 (Vol.40, No.2), pp.162-169.

Thankfully, there are many resources available for working with ESL speakers. Many of those resources are freely available on the Internet. And while I didn't have the Internet at home, I could access some things during our weekly trips to Smithers for meetings or supplies. One of the most helpful websites was www.easyenglish.info. Easy English is a form of English with a simplified grammar and a reduced vocabulary. It was especially developed with ESL speakers in mind.

I tried to follow the Easy English guidelines in preparing my sermons. So, for instance, I usually avoided the use of the passive – something that often confuses ESL speakers and listeners. I would also restrict the use of pronouns as ESL speakers often have a difficult time tracing the original referent. With respect to diction, I tried to avoid multisyllabic words as much as possible. I would often quote from a paraphrase of the Scriptures, the New Life Version, which used a restricted 750 word vocabulary.

In the services, I was directed by my sending church to use the NIV, though I have to admit that I was not always happy with this decision. Without going into a debate about Bible translations, the English of the NIV was, on the one hand, often too difficult for ESL speakers. On the other hand, the NIV's translation policy often made it difficult to preach – the translation was sometimes an interpretation and it could be challenging when my exegesis was different. So I became more sensitive to the value of a dynamic equivalent approach to translation in certain contexts, but at the same time more skeptical about leaving this work in the hands of organizations that are not under the oversight of Christ's church.

Conclusion

I wish that I could say more. For instance, about the place of prayer – it's critical in sermon preparation in any context. I could have said something about the role of the Holy Spirit. And then there was Catechism preaching – I started this in the last year that I was on the field and was experimenting somewhat. But I wanted in this presentation to give an overview of some of the challenges in preaching Christ in one particular mission field. Most of those other matters are common to all fields.

In conclusion, I want to make a case for Reformed missiology to develop a missionary homiletics. Kees Haak has made some contributions in this direction, especially with his book *Metamorfose*.¹ Hopefully, one day we'll see this important book translated into English. Kees Haak's doctoral advisor Jan Jongeneel in his *Philosophy, Science and Theology of Mission in the 19th and 20th Centuries* gives a wide variety of bibliographic resources on missionary homiletics.² However, most of these resources are in German or, if they are in English, are obscure and not easily available. There remains a lot of work

¹ *Metamorfose: Intercultureel begeleiden van kerken in een niet-christelijke omgeving*, C.J. Haak, Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 2002.

² *Philosophy, Science and Theology of Mission in the 19th and 20th Centuries: A Missiological Encyclopedia, Part II: Missionary Theology*, Jan A.B. Jongeneel, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997, pp.267-289.

to be done in this area for Reformed missionaries and missiologists. I believe we can start by making missionary homiletics one of the critical and non-negotiable aspects of our missionary training. Missionaries should not have to go to the field like I did and take a guess at how to do the most vital aspect of their work: preaching Christ. The message we bring is too precious to leave anything to chance and guess-work. Thank you.

The Law in Mission Preaching

A.J. de Visser

Introduction

C. Trimp has stated that the preaching of the law is a very difficult part of the great commission to proclaim the good news.¹ This comment, originally made with respect to the preaching in established churches, applies to preaching on the mission field as well, and maybe even more.

I still remember the words of an ex-missionary who had visited his former mission congregations and had listened to the preaching of his former native theological students. His dejected comment was: “Every single sermon I have heard was legalistic.” It appears that legalistic preaching and moralistic Christianity is a serious danger for young churches because the paganism which people were used to was legalistic as well. It is easily carried through into the Christian faith.

I plan to deal with this issue in the following way: First, I would like to discuss the relationship between gospel and law in preaching in general. Then follows a discussion of the relationship between gospel and law in mission preaching. Finally, I will try to apply the principles by taking preaching on the first commandment as an example.

1. Relationship between gospel and law in preaching

Two ‘thieves’

One of the early church fathers, Tertullian, has spoken about the two thieves of the gospel. Just like there were two thieves with the Lord at Golgotha, one on each side, so there are two thieves on each side of the gospel. On the one side there is the thief of legalism and moralism (law without gospel, salvation by works). On the other side there is the thief of antinomianism (gospel without law, salvation without asking obedience).

As Reformed preachers we try to avoid both dangers. To start with, we would not want to be guilty of preaching a gospel of ‘salvation by works’. So, although we know that we have to preach the law, we often find that difficult because we are afraid of being legalistic.

W.H. Velema² believes that Reformed preachers struggle to preach the law as a rule for a thankful Christian life (3rd part of Catechism). He believes that the cause is the historical background of the confrontation between the Reformation and Rome. We maintain that good works do not earn our salvation, and that salvation is by faith alone. So, in our preaching we do not want to lead our people back to the captivity of having to be saved by works. It is by grace, not works, that we are saved! However, this fear of being legalistic may cause our preaching to be too vague. The preacher stops short of applying the gospel to the Christian life.

On the other hand, as Reformed preachers we would not want to be accused of preaching ‘cheap grace’ either. We see weakness in the congregation, so we feel that we

¹ C. Trimp, *Klank en weerklank. Door prediking tot geloofservaring*, Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 1989, p. 66

² W.H. Velema, *Wet en evangelie*, Kampen: Kok, p. 163

have to emphasize the demands of the gospel. Faith without works is dead! So we preach the gospel of salvation by grace, but then we continue and emphasize that real faith needs to produce real fruits.

The result is often a kind of ‘yes – but’ approach. In the first point of the sermon the preacher comes with the joyful message of salvation. But the second point starts with a ‘but.’ Yes, you are saved, BUT now you have to show your faith by doing this and this and this. And if you do not have these fruits, you should take a hard look at yourself. As a result, the sermon is still legalistic after all. The hearer goes home knowing that salvation has been promised, but that he won’t get it unless he performs...

It seems that C. Trimp was right when he stated that the preaching of the law is a very difficult task!

Preaching in the Lutheran church

In 1966 the German theologian Manfred Josuttis published a book which has become a primer on legalism in preaching, at least in Europe (it has not been translated into English, as far as I know). The title is *Gesetzlichkeit in der Predigt der Gegenwart* (in translation: Legalism in Current Preaching).¹ Josuttis analysed more than 900 sermons, preached by 125 Lutheran preachers. His conclusion was that legalistic preaching was a major problem in the church.

Josuttis pointed to various forms of legalism in current preaching. We will mention a few of these forms, because it may help us to have a better picture of what legalistic preaching may be in practice.

First of all, Josuttis stated that already *the form of many sermons indicates legalism*. A quote: “Already the formal composition (“Aufbau”) of a sermon shows its theology.”²

He mentioned various examples of this, but the most widespread form which he found in the preaching of his time was a sermon form that used the ‘indicative – imperative’ model. This approach was popular in the NT theology of the time. It interprets the NT gospel message as a sequence of two parts, the first part announcing salvation (the indicative: you are saved), and the second part demanding a Christian life (the imperative: now do this and that...). According to Josuttis many sermons had this structure. He observed that this approach easily leads back to the old pietistic approach “This is what God has done for you – now what are you going to do for Him?” The demand becomes a legalistic demand. It is forgotten that God is the author not just of our justification but also of our sanctification.

In the following chapter Josuttis dealt with the *legalistic forgery of the law*. This refers to the widespread problem that preachers do not preach man in his depravity before the face of God. Rather, in moralistic fashion, they preach against practical things or phenomena which they see in the life of the people.

As an example Josuttis mentioned a sermon on the 1st commandment in which the preacher condemned the men for having good luck charms in their cars, and the women for scanning the horoscopes in the ladies’ magazines. However, if preaching does not go deeper than that, it does not touch the heart of the sinner and it does not place man in his

¹ Manfred Josuttis, *Gesetzlichkeit in der Predigt der Gegenwart*. München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1966.

² Josuttis, p. 51

rebelliousness before God. In fact, you place salvation in human hands. Just remove the good luck charm, just stop reading the horoscopes...and you are alright.

Josuttis suggested that there was an inherent semi-pelagianism in much of the preaching of his time: man is not dead in sin, man is sick. In other words, man's depravity is not taken seriously anymore.

In following chapters Josuttis dealt with the *legalistic forgery of the gospel* and the *legalistic forgery of the exhortation* (paranesis). Many preachers basically tell the congregation that a Christian, after having received salvation, must now do something to show that he really has faith.

There are various practical forms of this type of legalism. One form is that Christ is proclaimed as an ideal Example. He has done this and that, and now we as Christians should follow his example. Or Biblical saints may be portrayed as examples for us to follow. Look at how willing Paul was to go out and preach the gospel. Are you willing to do the same? Or, look at the believers in Jerusalem – how they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Have you experienced the same?

Another form is that Christ's kingship over the world is proclaimed and that the believer is then asked to make sure that this kingdom of Christ is established indeed. Especially those preachers that believe that Christians should be involved in social and political activity are prone to make this kind of application.

Preaching in the Reformed tradition

So far an impression of preaching in the Lutheran tradition. But how would the situation be with respect to preaching in the Reformed tradition?

I do not know of research that has been done about it, but I think that it would be safe to suggest that Reformed preachers struggle with the same problems. The pitfall of moralistic and/or legalistic preaching is difficult to avoid. It is just so easy to fall into that trap!

Take for example the epistle of James, the letter which speaks about the practice of Christian life and emphasizes that faith is useless when there are no deeds. It is not easy to preach on passages from the book of James in such a way that the application will not be legalistic or moralistic.

Or take the first letter of John. "Since God has loved us, we should love one another." Once again it is very easy to fall into the trap of legalistic application: If you do not love your brother, your faith means nothing. So take a hard look at yourself... Probably any one of us would be able to mention various examples of legalistic preaching which we have heard in our own churches.

If we go back a bit in the history of preaching in our Reformed churches, we find that the struggle with legalistic and moralistic preaching is an old one. In the 1930s and the 1940s of the previous century there was a fierce debate about preaching in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. We do not have time to relate that history here, but the outcome for the Reformed Churches (liberated) was an approach to preaching that was dubbed redemptive-historical and covenantal. *Redemptive-historical*: if you preach on an OT passage, you need to keep in mind the place of this particular story in the history of salvation that leads up to the work of Christ. *Covenantal*: we need to take into

account that God speaks to us as his covenant people and in this covenant there are the promises and demands.

I am a supporter of both the redemptive-historical and the covenantal approach to preaching myself. But I suggest that we as preachers do not always grasp the full Biblical implications of this approach. And I suggest that, in our tradition, there are two mistakes that are made quite easily.

On the one hand there is the danger that the preacher, for fear of being moralistic and legalistic, stops short of really preaching the law. The preacher shows what God has done in Jesus Christ for our salvation. It is a very comforting message for the hearers. Yet, the law (or what may be called the ‘demand’) fades into the background.

As you may know, the preaching in our Reformed tradition is sometimes criticized for being too ‘easy’ on the sinner. It is suggested that our preachers assume that the whole congregation is saved. We deny that, of course. No preacher assumes that everybody who is in the covenant is automatically saved.

Yet, it may be true that sometimes our preaching is too easy on the sinner, and that we fail to do what LD 44 of the Catechism says, namely, to preach the law so strictly “that the hearers may more and more become aware of their sinful nature and therefore seek more eagerly the forgiveness of sins and righteousness in Christ”. The reason for this, I would propose, is not so much that our preachers assume that everybody is saved, but that our preachers are afraid to be moralistic, and find it difficult to preach the law in a balanced way.

The other danger flows from a wrong understanding of covenantal preaching. This approach takes the “promise & demand” structure and applies that in a certain way. First you proclaim God’s promises to the people, then you proclaim God’s demands. This is, as we have pointed out earlier, the ‘yes - but’ approach. Yes, you are saved by grace, but now you are demanded to show it. It is like people telling you that there is no admission fee to enter the church, however, there will be an obligatory collection at the end.

Another form of the same error is taking the ‘promise’ for granted and emphasizing the ‘demand’ of the gospel. C. Trimp¹ laments the fact that the Christian life is often characterized as “living according to the demand of God’s covenant.” He reports having read an article in which he found the word ‘must’ no less than 70 times. As covenant people we ‘must’ do this and we ‘must’ do that, because that is what God demands...

Trimp suggests that the problem lies in a schematic view of the promise & demand structure of the covenant. It appears that many preachers think in terms of a balance between the two. You have to preach the promise and you have to preach the demand, and you should make sure that the two are in balance. The result, however, will be a legalistic type of preaching, because the preacher first proclaims salvation for free, but then it comes out that there is a demand: you have to show real faith by works, otherwise it implies that you are not saved after all.

¹ C. Trimp, *Klank & weerklank*, p. 55-56

Suggestions

How could we go about avoiding the pitfalls of legalism and moralism while at the same time avoiding the danger of preaching grace without preaching the law? A few suggestions.

1. First of all, we should revisit our understanding of the structure of the covenant. C. Trimp has pointed out that there is indeed a promise and a demand in the covenant, but that the promise ‘outweighs’ the demand. God not only *demand*s our obedience, but also *gives us* our obedience. That does not take anything away from the demand as such. Our human responsibility remains. But God knows that we are unable to live up to the demands of the covenant. So, in his love for us, God gives us all the blessings of salvation: not just our justification, but also the renewal of our lives, our sanctification.¹ This implies that we should not think of promise and demand as two aspects of the covenant that are in a state of equilibrium, but that we should understand that the promise has a preponderance over the demand (Trimp, in the Dutch original: “dat er niet een *evenwicht* is van belofte en eis, maar een *overwicht* van de belofte”).² It is here that we see the real beauty of covenantal preaching. It holds man 100 % responsible for living up to the covenantal demands, yet, knowing that man is unable to do so in his own power, it promises that God will establish this new obedience in our lives. God not only demands, He also promises to give what he demands!

Just as an aside, I wonder whether we should not look again at the word ‘demand’ (as translation of the Dutch ‘eis’). I’m afraid that this term may convey a legalistic flavor – as if this is about something that we have to do ourselves while God is watching and waiting whether we do it, yes or no. But the idea of the covenant demand is that, although we are indeed responsible to react in faith and obedience, it is God himself who works in our hearts, who renews us (see Lord’s Day 32 of the Heidelberg Catechism).

2. Second, we need to appreciate the nature of the covenant. The covenant between God and man is not a contractual type of agreement between two parties. The covenant is based on God’s love for us, and it creates room for a loving kind of relationship between God, who loved us first, and ourselves who learn to respond to God’s love in that covenant relationship. In this relationship the covenant demands do not have the character of cold contractual obligations. Rather, they reflect the atmosphere of a Father-child relationship with the Father teaching his children how they should live in order to find true happiness. I would like to emphasize this aspect especially for the preaching on the mission field. Especially against the background of pagan conceptions of God – where the gods are often seen to be far away, or unpredictable, or dangerous – this loving kind of relationship between God and his chosen people cannot be over-emphasized.

3. Third, we need to take a Trinitarian approach and point out how God the Father is involved in establishing and upholding the covenant relationship, how God the Son is

¹ *Klank & weerklank*, p. 53: “Wanneer God de vervulling van de eis maakt to inhoud van zijn belofte, is daarmee die eis nog niet van zijn aard beroofd.”

² *Klank & weerklank*, p. 57.

involved in establishing and completing our salvation, and how God the Holy Spirit is involved in applying Christ's blessings to our lives.

May I mention an aspect of the work of Christ which is often overlooked: his active obedience. The passive obedience of Christ (that He has suffered the penalty for our sins) is well known among our people and often mentioned in preaching. But I fear that the active obedience of Christ (that He is doing everything that the law demands in our place, confessed in Belgic Confession, art. 22) is often forgotten. However, it is an aspect that should not be forgotten when we preach 'the law'. The hearers may be comforted by the promise that even if we fail in our obedience, Christ has done it in our place, and through faith we have that perfect righteousness in Christ before the face of God.¹

With respect to the work of the Holy Spirit, it gives great comfort to know that the Holy Spirit is given to dwell in the hearts of the believers and to renew them into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christians still struggle with all their weaknesses and so often they resist the work of God in their lives. Yet, the Holy Spirit does the miraculous work of recreating and renewing our hearts and lives. To know this and to believe this, should also influence our approach of preaching. After all, it is impossible that those who are grafted into Christ should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness (Lord's Day 24).

2. Law and gospel in mission preaching

So far we have dealt with the problem of law and gospel in a general way, as it applies to preaching in general. Many of the aspects that have been mentioned so far, apply to the situation of the mission field as much as they apply to the preaching in established churches. But on the mission field it is even more important to deal with these issues, because the tendency towards legalism is aggravated by the fact that legalism is so strong in pagan faiths.

Influence of pagan background

Let me illustrate this by taking African Traditional Religion (ATR) as an example. In ATR the concept of God is basically deistic. There is a belief about a God who has created the universe, but who has since moved to a far away place and is not really involved in the matters of everyday life of the people. As a result, traditionally there is not much of a 'coram Deo' awareness among African people. The vacancy left by the missing God has been filled partly by the ancestor spirits who are believed to have supernatural powers, and who have power to punish or to help.

Secondly, the concept of sin in ATR is very shallow. It is believed that man is OK. As long as you live the kind of life that the tribe in general lives, you are doing well. The only real sin in Africa is to be anti-social. The only real sinner is the witch who secretly practices sorcery and tries to destroy the lives of other people.

How did a traditional African community distinguish between right and wrong? How did they know what to do in case of misfortune? As there was no sacred book, the

¹ For a discussion of the active obedience of Christ, see N.H. Gootjes, "Christ's Obedience and Covenant Obedience", *Koinonia*, Vol 19, 2, Fall 2002, p. 2-22.

community had to use other ways. These ways were: stick to the traditions that have been transferred from previous generations, use the powers of the traditional healers, and make sure that the whole community is in line.

How did the traditional African community prevent and combat evil and misfortune? Put in theological terms: How were they saved from misery and achieve salvation? The answer is basically: by performing the necessary rituals (e.g. a feast for the ancestors, with sacrifices; or using medicine against witchcraft). Ritualism was very strong in ATR. Man has to “do” something, man has to perform a certain ritual, preferably a ritual that has worked in the past, and a ritual that is approved by the traditional healers. And this ritual should not be changed but performed in the same way as it has been performed in the past. A change in ritual may offend the ancestor spirits. So we see that legalism is firmly entrenched in ATR, in two ways: (a) Man has to work out his own salvation. (b) Man has to follow certain rules and perform certain rituals.

Legalism in the mission church

The pagan worldview still influences the thinking of many Christians in the mission congregation. Let me illustrate this from my own experience as a missionary in South Africa.

One day the brothers of the mission congregation approached me with the question: “Does our church have a book of laws?” “No”, I answered, “we have the Bible, our confessions and the church order.” They inquired about the church order but in their opinion the church order was way too short.

The brothers felt that we needed a book with rules and regulations for any kind of situation that church leaders may run into. We need a law that says how many months it takes before a new member may be accepted as a full member, the brothers said. We need laws that explain what our church considers to be sins and what the punishments for all those sins are. The larger the book, the better.

The brothers referred to another church which had worked out the details of discipline for all kinds of sins. In that church, they told me, if a girl has a baby outside of marriage, she is suspended for six months. After that she may take part in the Lord’s Supper again and her child may be baptized. Every girl gets the same punishment, no problem.

If the same girl has a second child outside of marriage, she is once again suspended for six months. After that the child may be baptized, but she will not be allowed to take part in the Lord’s Supper until she gets married. If the same girl gets a third child, still being unmarried, there is no ‘grace’ anymore: This child will not be baptized until she gets married.

The advantage of this system, the brothers told me, is that everything is clear. There can be no complaints because everybody is treated equally. Nobody can say that he or she is ill-treated or that there is favoritism in the church. Whenever there is a complaint, the brothers said, we will just refer the person to the book of laws. So the request of the brothers was: “Please write the book of the laws of our church. Write everything down, in black and white. And with that book we will be able to lead the church. Whatever happens, we will show the people the book and tell them: This book has been written by our pastor, Rev. De Visser, and this is the law of this church.”

I must say that I had a hard time in convincing the brothers that we should not take this route. And I am sure that missionaries who have spent some years on the mission field, are able to tell similar stories.

This particular story illustrates legalism in two forms. First, we see the legalistic misinterpretation of the law as such. The law is not experienced as placing the sinner before the face of God. The law does not convict of sin. Instead, the law explains what the church community considers to be wrong. And if somebody has offended the church community (in ATR it used to be the tribal community), the law explains what should be done in order to put matters right. Sin and forgiveness are dealt with in a process of negotiation between the sinner and the church (the pastor). God is not involved. He is still far away (as in ATR).

Second, we see the legalistic misinterpretation of the gospel. The Christian life of obedience is seen as living according to a set of rules. Once again, God is not involved. He may have given us the Bible as a general guideline, but the church has to work out the details. So as a church member you have to negotiate with the consistory and the pastor of the church.

Now how does this affect preaching in the mission situation? There is indeed a strong tendency towards legalism in mission preaching, especially in the preaching of native evangelists and preachers.

Time and again I have had the frustrating experience of preparing a sermon with an evangelist, trying to show him how it is possible to preach on a certain text, preaching the gospel and preaching the law, without becoming legalistic. And then, when I heard him preach the sermon, it would go like this: He would first preach the sermon which we had prepared together (that was the part that he had written out on paper, 15 minutes in length), and then he would add a lengthy part of application (speaking ‘from the heart’ now, not from paper, for another 15 minutes) which would be totally legalistic.

Suggestions

There is no need to repeat the suggestions which have been made at the end of the first part. Everything which has been said there is applicable here as well. Let me offer some additional suggestions for the mission context.

1. First, it is important to choose words and terms with great care. As missionaries we are asked to preach in other languages, so we make choices about words. These choices are very important. Sometimes there may be various possibilities and every word has certain connotations.

An illustration in this regard: Rev. J. Vonkeman, who has worked as a missionary among the Zulu people in South Africa for decades, spoke at a mission conference in Pretoria in the 1990s about the problem of finding a good Zulu word for ‘covenant.’ He said that he had given up hope of finding a Zulu word which is free of legalistic misinterpretations.¹ He became so discouraged that he decided not to use the term ‘covenant’ anymore! In his view one cannot preach on the covenant in Africa without

¹ J. Vonkeman, “Een voorzichtig stapje praktische elenctiek in Afrika”, in *Kagiso. Bydraes vir Gereformeerde Sending in Afrika*, vol. 2, Pretoria 1999 (published by Sendingkommissie VGK Pretoria Maranata), p. 55-69.

being misunderstood in legalistic terms. People would think of it as a kind of legal contract and so on. Instead of covenant, Vonkeman decided to use the image of the Father-child relationship which, he believes, is better suited to represent the aspect of grace, without throwing out the forensic element.

This is quite a drastic decision, of course. Most missionaries, including myself, would not go that far, and rather try to find a term for 'covenant' that equals the original meaning as closely as possible, and then try to use the term in such a way that possible legalistic connotations are avoided. But Vonkeman's desire to find the right word in order to convey a Biblical concept is praiseworthy.

By the way, personally I have always used the term covenant in my preaching (with the risk of it being misunderstood in a legalistic sense). I believe that the covenant is a beautiful image that speaks to the heart of African people. It helps them to realize that God is not a remote God (as the traditional religion suggested) but that He is a holy God who desires to be so close to us that He enters into a covenant relationship with us.

2. Secondly, keep in mind that both justification and sanctification are the work of Christ. As Lord's Day 32 says: "Christ, having redeemed us by His blood, also renews us by His Holy Spirit to be His image." Of course, that does not take anything away from the responsibility of the believer to react in faith and obedience, but it gives us the right foundation: Christ works out his salvation in us, through the Spirit.

At some stage during my own development as a preacher in Africa, I decided to never move from 'promise' to 'demand' without inserting something about the work of Christ. I would try to show how beautiful the Christian life is. I would try to show how Christ aims to renew our marriages, to clean up our language, to restore safety and love in a community. Having said that, and having emphasized that Christ aims to work these things out in the lives of Christians, I would proceed to the call to obedience (the covenant demand) and try to encourage the hearers by pointing out that this is something that we are unable to do in our own power, but that God promises to give what He demands.

3. Third, the Lordship of Christ is an important theme. We profess that Christ has bought us with his precious blood and that we belong to Him. It follows, therefore, that He has the right of ownership to our lives, and that we are asked to obey this Master who has given his life in order to make us his own. What is striking in this, is the fact that Christian obedience has a very personal touch. We are not called to obey the laws of a church; no, as Christians we are called to obey a Person: our loving Master, Jesus Christ. This is different from the pagan understanding of obedience which is impersonal. In ATR people were expected to obey the laws of the group (the tribe) but there was no sense of responsibility towards a divine being. This still influences the attitude of Christians in the mission congregation.

I remember talking to young ladies who had broken the 7th commandment.

Usually these conversations would go along the following lines

The girl would admit that she had made "a mistake".

I asked: "What was wrong, then?"

She would say: "I am pregnant before being married."

I would ask what is wrong with that.

She would say: "I have broken the law of the church."

My reply would be: "That is not the real problem. We can work something out for that. But what do you think the real problem is?"

She would try again: "I think it is that you had taught us in Catechism class that we should not to do this, and now I have done it."

My reply: "No, that is not the real problem. What do you think the real problem is?"

She would think hard, and not be able to come up with an answer.

So finally I would say: "The real problem is that you have grieved the Lord. The Lord had promised to bless you. He wanted to give you marriage. He was willing to bless you in many ways, also by giving you children in marriage. But you did not wait. That is the problem. The Lord is grieved."

I remember how these girls often were amazed that I brought up this perspective. They could imagine that I could be offended, but that the Lord could really be grieved, was difficult to grasp.

It is on such occasions that young Christians grow in understanding the personal aspect of the covenant relationship with God. Only then there may be remorse and guilt, and a heartfelt prayer for forgiveness and reconciliation to God.

Practical application (preaching the 1st commandment)

Let us apply these principles to preaching on one of the ten commandments. I have chosen the first commandment because it is foundational for all other commandments.

The legalistic way

It is easy to preach on the first commandment in a legalistic way. In Africa it could go like this: Knowing that African people venerate the ancestor spirits traditionally, you take Deut. 18:9-11 which condemns divination, sorcery, witchcraft, and consulting the dead. You then apply it. "The Bible clearly says that ancestor veneration is a sin, so you people should stop doing this, even if you do it secretly."

This kind of preaching will have very little effect. It may drive ancestor veneration underground, but it will probably not change the minds and hearts of the people because they do not understand why it is wrong, and they have not really seen the Biblical alternative. The hearers will never understand why it is wrong if they do not understand that the living God is different from the image of God which they had inherited from previous generations.

The better way

We need to proclaim who God really is, in all his power and love and holiness. The hearers need to realize what has happened in the past, namely (to quote the apostle Paul, Rom. 1:23) that in their tradition the glory of the immortal God has been exchanged for man-made images. They need to realize that man tries to manipulate the gods into serving his needs (and indeed, in that context one may speak about ways in which man has tried to do that, e.g. by venerating the ancestor spirits), but that in fact the one and

only God has been looking after creation all the time and that He now calls on everyone to repent (see Paul's speeches as recorded in Acts 14 and 17).

So, instead of starting with Deut. 18, it would be better to start with Genesis 1, 2 and 3 (the creation and the fall, and the promise of salvation), and Genesis 12, 15, 17 (the covenant between God and man), and so forth.

Now the approach may vary according to the circumstances and taking into account the traditional kind of idolatry in a given area. J.H. Bavinck, in discussing the importance of the first commandment in a mission context,¹ distinguishes between three concepts of God: the primitive concept of God (as found in the animist worldview), the mystical concept of God (as found in Hinduism and Buddhism) and the Islamic concept of God. He points out that in each case man has changed the image of God and that, as a result, man is serving another god.

Bavinck points out that missionaries need to show the animist people that God is not a god that can be manipulated. We need to show the Hindu and Buddhist believers that God is not that mystical, deep, serene secret power with whom we may become one. We need to show the Muslim believers that the true God is not a kind of divine law-giver. Whatever the specific worldview and concept of God that the hearers held traditionally, in our mission preaching we need to give the hearers the full revelation about God, who has revealed Himself in his Son Jesus Christ. We need to make the pagan hearers aware that they have been living with a self-made image of God, that they have been trying to manipulate God into a position where He would serve their interests, and that they need to repent from that approach. Only then may we expect true conversion among the hearers, from serving idols, to serving the living God.

I would like to quote a Reformed missionary here, Rev. Jouk Kruidhof, missionary to the Papuan people in the 1970's and 1980's, who was interviewed by dr. J. Douma about his work and preaching among the Papuan people.² (Please keep in mind that this refers to preaching in an animist worldview).

Having discussed the basic Papuan beliefs in a complexity of gods and powers, Kruidhof explains how man tries to stand tall among these powers by keeping them at bay and trying to control and manipulate them. The god who is there, according to their beliefs, should be kept quiet. In fact, the best solution is to have him sleeping, because in that case he will not cause trouble. Quote:

Douma: How would you preach on the first commandment?

Kruidhof: By showing that JAHWE is different. He is the God that does not sleep, but neither is He a God who awakes in order to punish, or to fight with man. He is the God who has everything in himself, yet, He gives everything. He creates everything, for Himself, but also He gives to man. This God wants to be in a communion relationship with man. He gives HIMSELF to man (I am the LORD "your God"). In that sentence every word is new, strange, for them. No human heart could think that up. But that is the way He is, the true God: Man needs to step down from the pedestal which he has created for himself, but then he receives back God, and he is restored to a wonderful position in Jesus Christ.

¹ J.H. Bavinck, in *Sinai en Ardjoeno*, p. 21-45

² J. Douma, "De Tien Geboden in the Tiause gebied I", in *De Reformatie*, Vol. 56, p. 363 (14 March 1981); translated from the original Dutch

Therefore, preaching here means: To show the people that in all their religiosity they are trying to be king in their own closed world (even if it includes gods), and to preach the true God to them as the God who desires to be 'their God', who is looking for them, who makes them to die to pride and to be raised in Christ. It is preaching who the true God is. Completely new, revealed by God.

"No other gods before me..." That is to come to know the only true God rightly, to trust (!) in Him alone, and to expect all good (!) from Him, to love, fear and honour Him with all my heart..." (LD 34, Q/A 94). These things are impossible to pagan people. They cannot trust their god, or expect good things from him (unless they manipulate him into it). They just hope that he is asleep. How could they find joy in living before his face? It's impossible. To trust God and to serve Him with a joyful heart, that is impossible, unless you have learned to know Him, by His revelation.

I would like to close with an example of a sermon on the 1st commandment. Actually, it is an outline for a sermon, made by Rev. J. Vonkeman whom I have quoted earlier, missionary to the Zulu people in Natal, South Africa.¹

Outline for sermon on the 1st commandment

"You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3)

This is the first Word of the house rules of our Father. Children of the house ought to worship only their Father and to separate themselves from other so-called gods. In Canaan Baals and Ashtaroths and other gods were served. Names of gods of olden days have disappeared since, but the worship of others with different names is still being practiced in our time. This is the sin which is called in the Bible worship of idols or idolatry. It is having with the living God or instead of Him something, whatever, in which we put our trust. It could be the nature of the world, rain, money, political power, drink, greed, education, soccer, worldly love, sex, or the traditions which our fathers have given us. It may be a good thing or a bad thing. It may be something created by our Father or something figured out by ourselves. This then becomes the thing we pray to as if it was our God until we become its slaves and are unable to part with it. It is just a thing that becomes our god. The Bible then speaks about rulers, authorities and powers of this dark world (Eph. 6:12). Here then we touch the "tricks of Satan" who confuses and enslaves with idols or counterfeit gods the children of the heavenly Father. They swallow you up! Let us be aware that we don't have a discussion here about the worship of other gods at a school or in a college but living in the household of our Father the God who just had liberated his children out of Egypt and out of the dominion of Satan. May those that have been saved go back and pray to the gods from whose oppression they have been set free? No ways!

Because you ought not!

Please do remember that the first Word does not say: 'you should not have other gods', but that it says 'you should have no other gods before me', in His presence. This is the word of our caring Father who does not want to part with his children so that they get lost. It is also the word of the holy Father who is not laughed at. Children who serve other gods before Him arouse his anger. It means that they despise Him and push Him aside. It's not done!

¹ Unpublished, original in Zulu, made by Rev. Vonkeman as a sermon help for evangelists. This English translation is based on a Sotho-translation of the original and may not be entirely accurate.

Our Father wants to be the only One that is being prayed to among his children. He does not share our worship with other gods.

Therefore his children better take care when they even wear in church an *isiphandla* (an arm-ornament, a piece of skin of an animal as a sign that it was offered at home to the forefathers); they confess with it: “we are under the authority of the forefathers” but their prayers confess: “we are under authority of our Father in heaven...”

God is a jealous God. Do you understand now that the veneration of other gods is called adultery in the Bible? (Hosea 1-3). Therefore one should always choose afresh: who is my God. He, who is Jehova - HE IS or idols. The history of Joshua is our history of today: the people of Jehova are before Him because the worship of idols is still always carried on in their midst. Then it says: choose now whom you are going to serve (24:15). A similar situation is found on mount Carmel (I Kings 18). Who are your gods? Have a proper look at them! Then you re-confirm your old choice again: “as for me and my house, we shall serve the Lord”(Josh 24:15)

Because you need not!

The Ten Words are not a whip that the Father uses to beat his children with saying: don't you or.....! It is a word full of love that says: why have you run away from me to trust idols? It fits in well to read here Isaiah 40 to 50. There God urgently asks his people: come on, bring your gods here that I have a look at them and see whether they are equal to me. Am I not your Maker and your Savior? Bring here then your gods: Money or Sex or Tradition or Power that I see if they can set free and forgive and protect like I do. It is just like a young married man who asks his bride who ran away : “what have you been short of, is my love not sufficient to you, do you think I could not look after you?” Please do remember all that our Father did for you in Jesus! Would He not be able to direct your life until you safely arrive home?

Because you cannot!

There is no-one who can serve two masters (Matth 6:24). You stick to one and give up the other. My Lord cannot share my love with a counterfeit master. Otherwise he withdraws, moves away from me and leaves me to the idol I have chosen for myself until I am swallowed up by it. Therefore let me choose well because it is only one who will stay with me: our Father in heaven or my idol on earth

Prophetical Preaching Among Pagans, Papists and Pentecostals
Bram de Graaf

Introduction

When we received the invitation to participate in the Mission Conference, we were also asked to contribute with a short talk about our experiences. Prof. Geertsema wrote the following instruction:

“The intention of your contribution is just to share your experiences. We do not expect an academic paper. We want to bring our missionaries together to discuss the work and perhaps help one another.”

So, accordingly, I wrote a short contribution, talking about my experiences on the mission field with respect to *the preaching*. Talking about my preaching on the mission field, I would first like to say something about my historical background with respect to the preaching. In the second part I would like to say something about the Brazilian situation in which I work as a preacher: among Pagans, Papists and Pentecostals. This situation has a strong influence on the topics of my sermons and Bible studies; I will deal with that in the third paragraph. The way of preaching is also different then in a regular situation; we will look to that in the fourth paragraph. Finally, I want to say something about the feedback that I get on the mission field.

1. Prophetical Preaching - Background.

For a better understanding of my preaching on the mission field it is necessary to say something about my training for the ministry and my experiences as a minister. I'm a minister with a Dutch background: trained at the Theological University of the Gereformeerde Kerken (art. 31 C.O.). My teacher in Homiletics was Prof. Dr. C. Trimp. He trained us to preach in a redemptive-historical way. He taught us to read the Old Testament with the spectacles of the NT, to preach the NT in connection with the OT, and to always have Christ in the center. I call this type of preaching: prophetical preaching. According to Rev. 19:10: “For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of the prophecy.” Preaching the word of Christ is a prophetical preaching.

I also believe that a minister or a missionary has to be considered as *a messenger of God*. Like Isaiah tells us in ch. 52: 7: “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation.” Just before I left Holland to go to the mission field I experienced some discussions about the homiletics of preaching: the narrative way of preaching in which the minister acts as a guide, leading the congregation into the historical context of the bible narrative; or the minister as a medium, meditating about a text of the bible and transmitting his ideas and emotions that came up in reading the Word of God. I defended the prophetical way of preaching and I still believe that that's the way we should preach. I'm even more convinced about it after having been five years on this mission field

2. The Brazilian Situation

Here I discovered even more the value of this kind of preaching, living in the midst of Pentecostals who preach in an exemplaristic way and Papists who explain the Word of God according to their Roman Catholic tradition.

I'm confronted with these ideas because that's the situation in which I work in Maceió. Maceió is the capital of the state of Alagoas. It's a big city of approximately 750,000 inhabitants. The main religion is the Roman Catholicism, which was transplanted here in the 16th century by the Portuguese. Since the beginning of the twentieth Century the Pentecostal churches settled here and are a fast growing group of churches.

When I came here the Reformed church of Maceió was started in a poor neighborhood (*a favela*) that was invaded by people who came from the interior of Alagoas. They were looking for a better situation in Maceió. In the year 2000 there were about 10 members, while we now have a core group of 24 members, 10 baptized members, 11 so called 'congregados', who study the bible to become a members, and a group of 20 visitors. The fast majority of these members started their lives in the Roman Catholic Church and about thirty percent visited a Pentecostal Church before entering our Reformed church. There is about ten percent that comes without any background.

Most of the time, those without a background are illiterate; they are very difficult to reach, because the Reformed churches have high standards. Our 'sola scriptura' recommends that people will first learn to read before they might start to study the Bible in order to become a member. It's easier for the Roman Catholic Church to reach out to the illiterate, because they have their images, their statues and paintings, which speak to the imagination of the illiterate. Even the Pentecostals have an advantage because they don't focus on the sola scriptura, but they have their visions and prophecies – which are also accessible for the poor and the illiterate.

The members that came from the Roman Catholic background showed very little knowledge of the bible. The knowledge they had was dominated by the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church. There is a very strong belief in the saints: São Antonio, São João, São Pedro, Padre Cicero and especially Mother Mary. There is also a lot of superstitious thinking that is a mixture of African religion and Christian thinking.

Especially the confrontation with the Pentecostals is very profound. The Pentecostal churches are in one point very explicit and that is their rejection of the Roman Catholic Church with her traditions. They rigorously reject everything that seems to be connected with the Roman Catholic tradition: infant baptism is one example of that. The Reformed Church has a different position. They rejected the errors of Rome, but stayed with the biblical elements that remained. Therefore the Pentecostals consider the Reformed Church as a kind of reformed Roman Catholic Church: we don't have the images, but we do have infant baptism. On the other hand: the Roman Catholics congregados recognize the Credo, the Lords Prayer, and infant baptism, but they miss the ceremonies; the statues of Christ and the adoration of the saints;

With respect to the Bible, my members told me that they consider the reformed preaching a blessing: it really explains the text of the Bible. Pentecostal preaching is superficial. It doesn't explain the text, but uses the text as a rack for their exemplaristic sermons. On the other hand, I would like to mention that the Pentecostals who I have met

have a good knowledge of the Bible, especially the Old Testament prophecies. They have knowledge, but different perceptions. They think differently about the dispensations, about the work of the Holy Spirit and about eschatology. They don't respect the Old Testament, only with respect to the giving of the tithes, but even on this point they select their texts.

In such a context we can easily see the differences with the Reformed Churches where they preach the unity of Scripture, preach the Old Testament in a redemptive-historical way; read the Old Testament with the spectacles of the NT, preach the NT in connection with the OT, and always have Christ in the center. That leads to another perception about the covenant, about infant baptism, about the work of the Holy Spirit, about the dispensations, about the millennium.

The prophetic preaching is a strong weapon that we have: a double-edged sword, *“it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, it judges the thoughts and the attitudes of the heart”* (Hebr. 4:12).

3. Topics of My Sermons and Bible Studies

In my confrontation with the little bible knowledge that there is among Roman Catholic believers, I decided to study the Bible with my members, using the Bible studies to read and to explain the Bible.

- Read the Old Testament and see how it is fulfilled in the NT: show the unity between the OT and the NT; fundamental if you want to explain how the covenant of grace works;
- Preach the OT texts, that we find in the NT (in the gospels, in the letters of Paul and especially in the Revelation) and explain *how* they are fulfilled;
- I love to preach according to the liturgical year:
 - i. Christmas time: starting with one of the gospels;
 - ii. From New Year till Good Friday: the passion of the Christ;
 - iii. Eastern: the death of Christ;
 - iv. The 40 days after Eastern: the secrets of the Kingdom of God;
 - v. Ascension of Christ;
 - vi. Pentecost: Acts 2, 8, 10;
 - vii. About the work of the Spirit: Acts, 1 Corinth;
 - viii. July till October: Old Testament texts or a series about one book, or about one topic;
 - ix. November: Advent;
- This works for me as a guideline: not a law of Medes and Persians; if necessary another text may be preached, but I will always try to combine the moment with a text.

Once a month we celebrate the Lords Supper: we made a special liturgy for that service; The form of the Lord Supper is divided in 12 parts; every month we teach one part of the old reformed form of celebrating the Lords Supper;

the sermon is now completely focused on the celebration of the Lords supper and strengthens the teaching part of the form.

As a rule we preach the Catechism every Sunday; to instruct the congregation about the reformed doctrine; there is a difference although: the text for the sermon is the Bible; the Reading is the Catechism; we have chosen this way to make it very clear that the Bible is the cornerstone of the reformed confessions.

4. The Way of Preaching

a) Short Sermons

In my first years as a minister in Holland my sermon had a length of 8 pages (font: 12); later on – after participating in a course about the presentation of a sermon - it became 6 pages and when I came in Brazil it became 4 or 5; now it is three. Four pages is the maximum.

b) Always on Paper

I write my sermons always out on paper. There are several reasons for that:

i) Necessary to create a stock of sermons.

1. Put the sermon on the Internet
2. Give the sermon to elders for reading elsewhere
3. For our radio program
4. For myself to use it again.

ii) Necessary to control myself

5. Control the language
6. Control the content
7. Control the length.

c) Using maps or overhead projector

Considering the lack of knowledge that exists among my members, I don't feel any difficulty in using maps or even overhead projector during the service. It may help enormously to support the preaching of the Word.

That's also a strong condition: it should be functional! It may never replace the preaching of the Word of God, nor weaken the attention.

d) Text Choice: Brazilian Situation or Local Context

The choice of the text comes up from the situation in the congregation. That situation is different from the situation in Holland or Canada. The fact that I have not touched more then 90% of my old sermons may show that there are big cultural differences;

e) Strong Pentecostal Context

For sure the strong influence of the Roman Catholic Church and the Pentecostal churches plays a part in the choice of the Bible text. My members don't want to

hear moralistic sermons in which a certain lifestyle is preached. They want to be Reformed in their thinking; they want to hear Reformed doctrine based on the Scriptures.

5. Evaluation of Sermons

Here in Maceió we adopted a custom to evaluate the sermon after the morning service. The members will have the opportunity to ask questions and to give their reactions. There is a small group that makes use of that. The others show their approval by their expressions during the evaluation.

There is also an evaluation as part of the training for office bearers. One of the participants has to read a sermon and then the others will evaluate his presentation, but they may also discuss the content of the sermon.

And there is always a point on the agenda that deals with the sermons. They may use the opportunity whenever they want.

There is an evaluation that comes from outside the church: most of the sermons will be read via the local radio station. The reactions that we get are good: nice biblical sermons.

Finally there is a fourth way to check the feedback and then we have to look to the fruit of the preaching.

Does it bear fruit? We do see fruits. The church was very small when I came in Maceió. It was a young church. People were not very open to the outsiders and there was little evangelistic power. In 2003 I decided to concentrate my sermons and Bible studies on the work of Evangelism and to work towards an open attitude in which LOVE is fundamental. If we compare the situation of two years ago with the current situation then I may say that that situation is very different: the members are open, friendly to our new guests; visitors feel themselves comfortable; there is a good communion of saints; the young people started an evangelism project visiting the neighborhood, while other members function as a second wave, visiting those people who showed interest in having another visit.

Allow me to say that this little paper was prepared and discussed in the training group for new office bearers.

May our Lord bless these young men, so they may become elders who will watch the flock of Christ and who will look after good, solid, nutritious preaching.

Ecclesial Partnership as a Challenge for Mission Work

Ben van der Lugt

1. Introduction

Scope of the speech: 'zooming out'

The main theme of the conference apparently is about preaching the gospel on the mission field. Six of the speeches on the program will tell the story of how the preaching is done in the different missionary situations the Canadian churches are involved in.

This theme zooms in on the well known goals formulated by Voetius: preaching the gospel with the aim of 'the conversion of the gentiles' and 'the planting the church'. My speech intends to zoom out.

Preaching the gospel takes place in a missionary project.

That project is positioned in a broad societal, political, social and cultural context.

That context has been and is part of broad world historical developments:

colonialism, imperialism, decolonization, globalization, to just mention some of those developments.

They inevitably have formative effects on the mission project in which the preaching of the gospel is carried out and the planting of the church takes place.

This formative relationship needs to be taken into account in the strategy and policy for the mission field; after having zoomed in on preaching, 'zooming out' will bring those broader macro-structures in sight, ready to analyse what claims they put on the proper strategy and policy for mission work.

This is expressed in the title of the speech: 'Ecclesial Partnership as a challenge for Mission work.' My main message will be that missionary strategy and policy in Reformed Churches¹ is often flawed because of insufficient attention given to the concept 'Ecclesial Partnership'.

Where does this concept come from?

One more preliminary remark is probably desirable: where does this concept and my message come from?

I have been involved for quite some time in the mission project of the *Reformed Churches (Liberated) in The Netherlands* (RCN) in Irian Jaya, Indonesia. At a certain moment in the history of this project, an external impulse by the Indonesian government forced the mission very unexpectedly and abruptly to restructure the mission project; this restructuring actually meant that 'Partnership' (a church-church type of model for the relationships) was to be the central concept for strategy and policy. At that moment, the mission was hardly prepared for that move, but at that moment, there was no way out.

But with hindsight, the conclusion is that actually it was high time for this change. It has been a very beneficial impulse, initiating a needed development.

¹ With 'Reformed churches' in this speech I mean mainly those churches that function in or in some relation with the network of the ICRC. I do not differentiate between Reformed and Presbyterian Churches.

This project-history made us study mission history; we learned that especially in circles of the 'Ecumenical Movement', missions had already much earlier struggled with the same challenges of ecumenical partnership.

Later I became involved in IRTT's training programs.

This strategic concept became a core issue in IRTT's programs: in coaching the sending churches and bodies in the RCN, in training the missionaries sent by the RCN. Furthermore, several times IRTT has been invited to be a consultant for the development of mission projects of other Reformed Churches, some of them members of the ICRC, some of them congenial with the ICRC but not officially being a member.

These experiences strengthened our conviction that the concept of 'partnership' is a very much needed tool for elaborating strategy and policy for mission work done by these Reformed Churches.

For this reason IRTT is very grateful for having the chance to present this speech to some of these churches in Canada.

2. From 'Mission' to 'Ecumenicity': A Structural and Missio-Historical Analysis

Introduction

In this paragraph I will present and explain a visualized model that represents an analysis of what happens in the development of a mission project.

I call it a structural analysis; that means that I will emphasize the set of relationships between the main actors that are involved in or related to a mission project. This unavoidably leads to a terminology that probably is more sociological than missionaries and mission bodies are used to.

In the diagram the main actors are visualized as figures (blocks, triangles, etc); the relationships between the actors as lines / arrows.

From a structural perspective I will present three main stages of the development of a mission project, each visualized by a diagram¹.

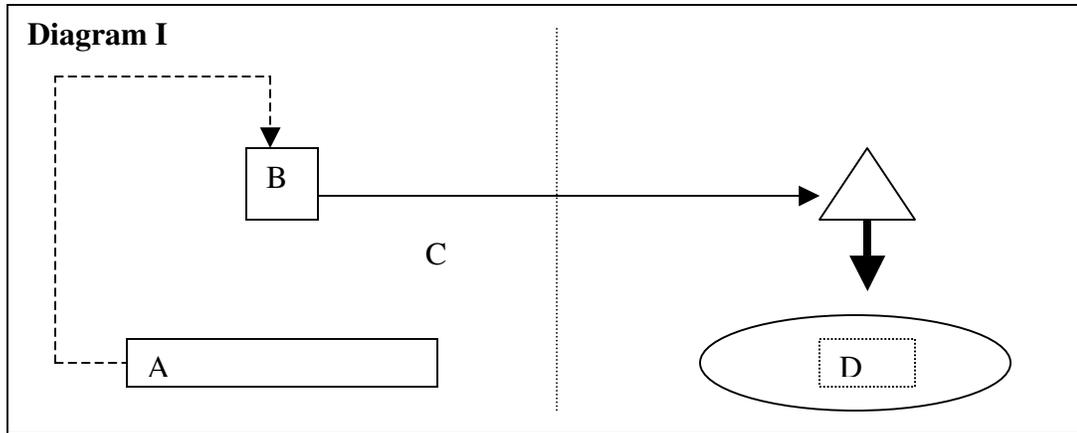
Although a structural analysis prevails, in the description I will now and then refer to stages of mission history and world history. There is some kind of parallel between the development stages of mission projects from a structural perspective, and the stages of development of mission history against the backdrop of world history.

Stage I : 'Mission'

¹

Not too much should be read into diagrams. Positioning an actor 'higher' or 'lower' as such does not say anything about the positions defined in Reformed Church Polity.

The diagram is of course necessarily a simplification of a more complex reality, but on the other hand, it is my experience that a clear diagram, dynamically presented, very much facilitates a clear understanding of the structures and processes under discussion. The static presentation of such diagram on paper might not have the same impact.



With the aid of this first diagram some structural questions can be discussed about the initial stage of a mission project.

Who sends?

In Reformed missionary thinking it has always been the church that sends missionaries; generally speaking, the formation of missionary societies (denominational, inter-denominational) in which ultimately bodies that were not authorized by church-structures had authority over mission projects and over the preaching of the gospel in those projects, was seen as not acceptable. The church is symbolized in the diagram by A. To carry out what is seen as its responsibility, derived from the church's insight in the biblical missionary mandate, the church (either the local congregation or the supra-local church-structures¹) installs a body (committee, board; B in the diagram) and delegates to that body authority, responsibilities and tasks to carry out the missionary mandate. The core task of this agency is, of course, sending a missionary (C). It can be concluded then that the church (A), by delegating authority and responsibilities to its 'missionary agency' (B), sends a missionary or missionaries (a mission team), in the diagram visualized by C.

Where?

Where are missionaries sent to?

Very generally speaking, one might say missionaries are always sent across some border, into a somewhat unknown 'world.' The apostles for example were sent across the 'dividing wall' between the Jewish world and the 'world' of the gentile peoples, living in the Roman Empire.

This border is visualized by a vertical line in this and the following diagrams.

¹ This is an important issue, but will not be elaborated here.

Since the 'Great (missionary) Century', missionaries were almost exclusively sent to the 'Third World.'¹ In the beginning of that era, missionaries went beyond the colonial footholds, established at the coasts of the Third World continents. They were the pioneer missionaries, travelling inland, fully dependent on the support of the local political and societal structures.

In a later stage, usually called 'imperialism', missionaries were sent to colonial states. Those states were created in the course of the 19th century: a political structure, the top of which was manned by European colonial personnel, was imposed upon the local and regional political and societal structures, within a newly defined territory. The European colonial (imperial) government started some kind of colonial project to 'develop' that newly formed, fragmented and differentiated society, living within the borders of that colonial state.

From that time on, most of the missionaries from the 'First World' were sent to the colonies (colonial states) of their own countries; mission projects were positioned in those imperial structures.

What task?

In the 17th century, Voetius², explicitly formulated a set of goals for mission work. Usually that set is summarized in three goals: the conversion of the gentiles, the planting of the church and the glory of God³.

The first two goals of that set have become the concrete and operational goals for Reformed mission work. That was the task assigned to the missionaries sent to the mission field: preaching the gospel should lead, under the blessing of the Lord, to the conversion of people and the people that confessed their faith in Christ as their Saviour were brought together in a new community of believers, the congregation. In diagram I the formation of a new community, out of the gentile community, is visualized in D.

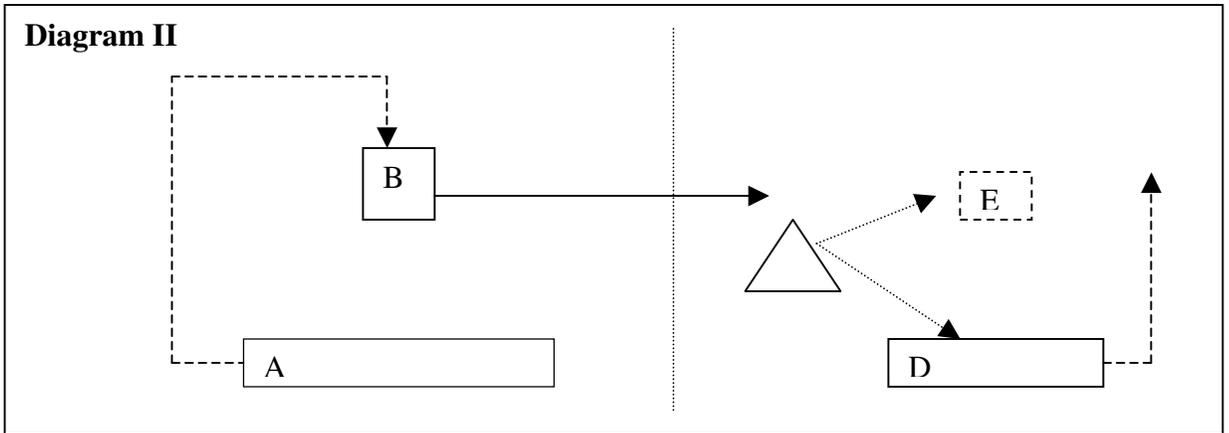
That second goal is the transition to the next diagram.

Stage II : 'Mission' and 'Church'

¹ This is of course a anachronistic use of the concept 'Third World', as this concept was coined in the 1950s. The validity of the concept has been questioned many times, but on the other hand it is a useful concept as long as it is not used to neglect the big differentiation in the collection of states that statistically belong to the category 'Third World'.

² 1589-1676. Jongeneel: '... first Protestant to write a comprehensive theology of mission' (*Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, 708); Schirrmacher: '... the spokesman of the emerging mission-oriented Reformed pietism in the Netherlands ...' (*Evangelical Dictionary of World Mission*, p. 1002).

³ See H.A. van Andel: *De Zendingsteer van Gisbertius Voetius*, Kampen 1912; p. 143)



Planting the church as a goal of Reformed mission work first of all meant the formation process of local congregations, led by elders. This has been an important focus of mission work: training the people in the community of believers that apparently had the charisma to become the local leaders of the congregation and install them as a consistory, taking on responsibility and authority for leading the congregation.

It is historically logical that this first step of institutionalization (officially establishing local congregations by installing a consistory) is followed by further institutionalization of the church, parallel to developments the sending churches had gone through themselves in their own history.

Local congregations have common interests that need to be taken care of, and on the other hand, the context not seldom requires regional church structures (the government for example might require registration of the church as a denomination). The formation of a supra-local structure (bond of churches, 'kerkverband', a denomination) is therefore a logical consequence (in the diagram visualized by E); supra-local institutionalization therefore is an inevitable part of missionary strategy and policy.

It is not just historically logical, concrete impulses within the churches will propel this further institutionalization: the understanding of belonging together as congregations in one region, the wish to be responsible for their own common things, the wish to do it in their own way. External impulses can be the growth of nationalist or postcolonial emotions, that made church leaders critical about the dominant position of the missionary.

It is important to realize that this stage, and its processes to come to the total regional structure needed, as visualized in diagram II is a process that takes some time. Of course in the total process, there are specific moments that mark clear changes of status; the official transfer of authority and responsibility for ecclesial matters on the different levels, from the missionary to new leaders is such a moment that needs to be marked very clearly.

Stage II is a transitional stage that should be as brief as possible; the process in that transitional stage is directed at the situation in stage III.

Two things need to be said about this process.

First of all, the process of supra-local institutionalization is inherent in the total task of the mission. Although Voetius did not elaborate this in his missiology, it is a necessary extension of his goal 'the planting of the church'. It is a fully legitimate and should be an explicit component of the missions strategy and policy. Concrete tasks and duties for missionaries should be derived from this explicit strategy and policy: education for leadership for example, and the training in proper procedures of leadership and church polity.

The second thing is that during and because of the institutionalization process, the position of the missionary needs to be redefined; in diagram II this is visualized by giving another position to triangle C.

In diagram I, the missionary (mission team) was on the top: the missionary had full authority and responsibility over the total mission project. The formation of local congregations and their consistories does already put some limitation on the authority of the missionary. The more so when the regional institutionalization will lead to the formation of bodies taking on authority and responsibility for the further development of the churches.

Although the missionary (mission) is legitimately involved in the processes shaping that further supra-local institutionalization, it can not be from the position he had in the beginning of the project.

This creates unavoidably a structural problem that requires serious attention in the missionary policy: on the one hand redefining the ecclesial authority and responsibility of the missionary, that from the beginning indeed had the authority and responsibility of almost everything, and on the other hand, acknowledging the growing authority and responsibilities of the 'new leaders' of the church. This is a delicate process.

Western missions have struggled with this problem in the course of mission history, especially during the world historical stages of colonialism and imperialism. Missiological views and missionary policy concepts were formulated to handle this structural problem. One of them is the famous 'three selves' – concept. Criteria were defined that were used to assess the degree of growth of the churches and based on that assessment the capabilities to take on authority and responsibility were determined; the strategy of the mission was defined in relation to that.

Based on the experiences I explicated in the Introduction, I am inclined to conclude that most Reformed missions have been rather ambivalent in this respect. Part of it is understandable; finding the right balance in such a delicate structural problem is not easy.

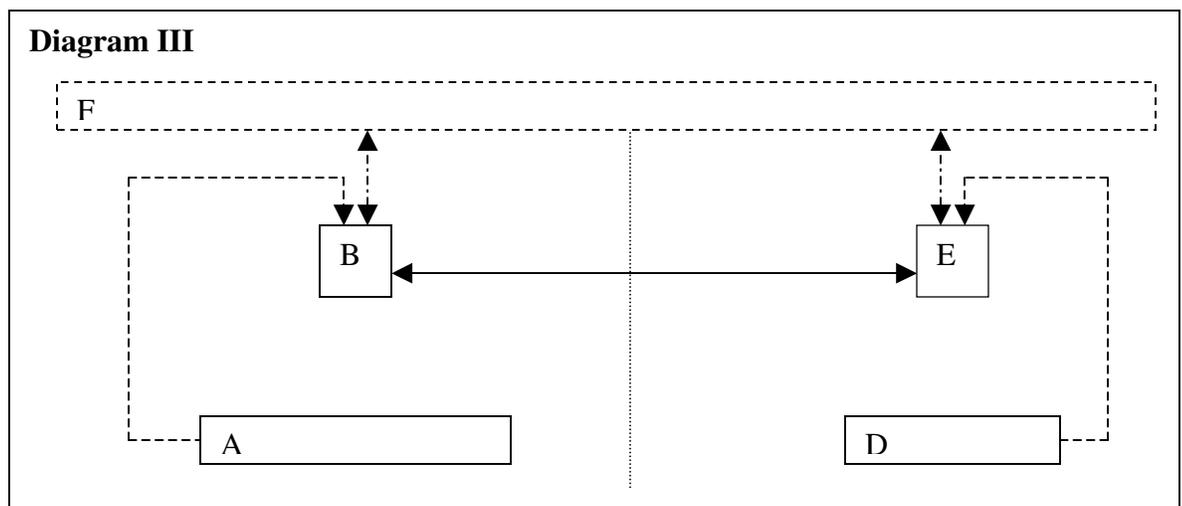
Real factors sometimes made it difficult: minimum qualifications for leadership could sometimes not be met by people coming from illiterate, geographically remote and culturally and sociologically traditional societies.

But sometimes more ideological factors played a role; missionaries sometimes adhered to views on imperialism, race and culture that hindered them to objectively assess capabilities for contextual leadership; sometimes pietistic and romantic, anti-institutional views and spirituality did not allow them to have a clear view on the need for the churches to take on an active role in their own context and society.

In many cases, internal and external impulses brought an end to that ambivalence. As said earlier, legitimate claims from the church leaders who, through the process of institutionalisation of supra-local structures, had gradually taken on authority and responsibility, more and more questioned the position of the mission and the missionary. Perhaps the mission could for some time maintain its position of unquestioned authority, as long as that position of the mission was backed up by colonial or imperial structures, but earlier or later the impulse for redefinition of that position would surface. Not seldom drastic changes in the world historical situation (decolonisation, the end of Apartheid) initiated a process that would lead to the end of that position of the mission. Sometimes it was initiated by forceful claims from the leadership of the churches (as for example in the Moratorium-debate of the 1970s).

A central position and role of the mission was no longer possible; churches would do their own things and in this way room was created for doing it in their own, contextualized way.

Stage III : Church – Church relations, Ecumenicity



Ideally this was to bring about a situation that can be called 'Ecumenicity': the relation of church – mission (B-C in diagram I and C-E / C-D in diagram II) evolved into a church-church relation, a bilateral ecumenical relationship: in our diagram: B-E. E being the body of the church that took on authority and

responsibility for leading the bond of the churches in accordance with the rules for Church Polity¹.

But this bilateral ecumenical relationship is just part of a broader development: multilateral ecumenicity. Churches formed worldwide, ecumenical networks and organizations (in diagram III visualized by F). In our era of globalisation this is to be seen as an important opportunity and responsibility of churches. This is fully justified by a biblical view on the eschatological future of the church; the differentiated togetherness that has been promised should be a strong impulse for the churches to manifest this togetherness as good as possible in ecumenical relationships and activities².

The network of Reformed churches I referred to in my introductory paragraph have formed the *International Conference of Reformed Churches* (ICRC). This is seen for the time being as the manifestation of what can be called Reformed Ecumenicity.

Conclusion

The mission project I have been involved in, was propelled into a drastic restructuring process by an external impulse. The Indonesian government, facilitated by huge income from the international oil crisis of the 1970s (Indonesia is an OPEC-member), finally reaching out to the interior of Irian Jaya, brought to an end the monopoly position the mission had as 'change agent' and was only willing to allow the mission to continue contributing to further developments of the interior, under a very strict set of conditions, boiling down to the requirement of 'Indonesianization' within only a couple of years. That meant: institutionalisation of Indonesian regional structures that within only some years would be able to take over the total authority and responsibility of the total program³. The only acceptable position of the mission in Holland was to be partner of that new local structure, while the missionaries became personnel in that new structure.

As I said in my introduction: our mission was not really ready for this drastic move. There was no well thought through and elaborated policy that had prepared the mission and the missionary for a development in that direction.

Since I had the opportunity through my involvement in IRTT to observe mission projects and policies of other Reformed churches, I have come to the conclusion that those mission projects and policies do not seldom manifest the same flaw.

-
- ¹ Unit B in diagram III is not necessarily the mission agency it originally was; because of the change in structure its role might be taken over by an ecclesial committee handling ecumenical relations. Mission committees are of course not deleted from the church structure.
I prefer not to use the word 'mission' and 'missionary' anymore for what structurally is an ecumenical relation (or a partnership for providing 'Aid' to an ecclesial partner, as will be elaborated in paragraph 3 in my speech). The concept 'mission' can better be reserved for situations where under the authority of the sending church the gospel is preached and churches are planted (diagram I and in a sense II).
- ² That this togetherness does not mean the loss of clear identity is presupposed but not elaborated here. For 'ecumenicity' should each time be read 'Reformed Ecumenicity'.
- ³ It was a very extensive and differentiated program; besides ecclesial programs, there was a broad program of social, economic and cultural development (education, medical, agricultural).

With the terminology of my analysis and diagrams that flaw can be described as follows: there is too much focus on stage I and the policy is insufficiently oriented to goals directed to stage III, to be worked on in that transitional stage II. In other words: the concept 'mission' for too long was the focus; the concepts 'Ecumenicity' and 'Partnership' have not been given the proper strategic position in mission policies and mission projects that have been initiated and developed under the authority of those Reformed churches.

My 'message' therefore is: Reformed Ecumenicity and Ecclesial Partnership should be given a prominent place in all missiological¹ and missionary thinking of Reformed Churches.

3. Ecclesial Partnership for 'Aid'

Introduction

This could have been the end of my story: an analysis of some kind of a flaw in Reformed missiological and missionary thinking and the message to give proper attention in strategy and policy to the concepts 'Ecumenicity' and 'Ecclesial Partnership'.

But there is a compelling reason to go one step further.

That reason is what sometimes is called 'the Global Rift.'

This refers to a structural disparity that divides the earth; this worldwide phenomenon needs to be explicitly brought into our analysis.

This structural disparity is the outcome of a longer world historical development in which many interdependent processes, inextricably intertwined, brought about this 'global rift,' dividing the earth in a part that is 'rich' and a part that is 'poor.'

It is not easy to assess in a balanced way all the aspects of this structural disparity, being poor and being rich, 'wealth' and 'poverty', of course being very conspicuous and existential aspects, but certainly not the only one and probably even not the one best fit to characterize what it structurally is².

The rift being 'structural,' that contains a warning to not too easily compare aspects that seemingly are the same. The 'poverty' so often spoken of in the Bible and the related spiritual and ethical claims on the Christian community how to handle this, should not too easily be translated to the structural economic and societal problems of 'poverty' in the Third World. Somewhat provocatively said: Paul did not know of the structural problems of the 'Global Rift.'

On the other hand, the biblical spiritual and ethical claims of unity in the congregation, in spite of great differences in social status and wealth and poverty, and Paul's efforts to organize a fair redistribution of means because of a problem in Jerusalem, contain crucial lessons to be applied to the differences between churches

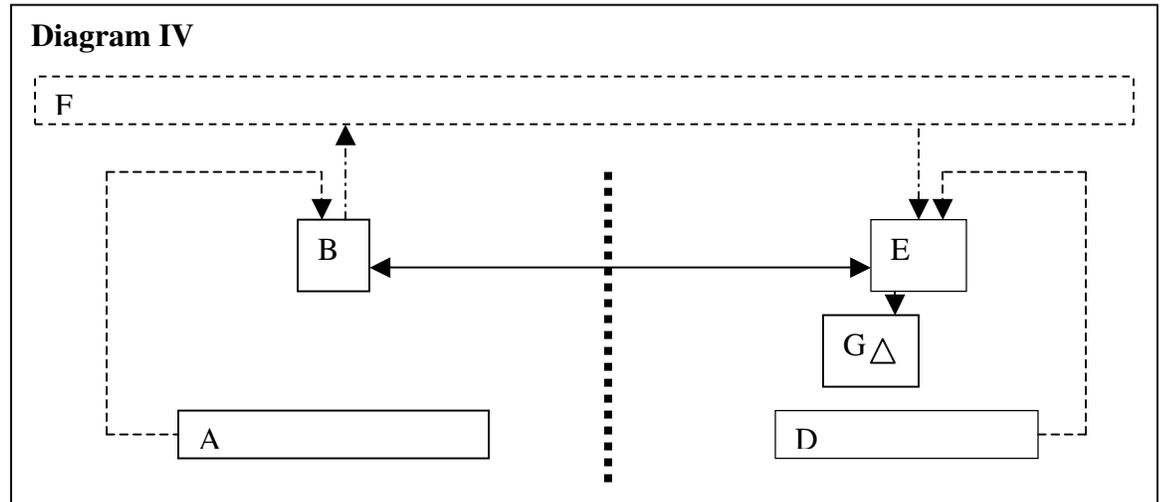
¹ At a conference in February 2005, IRTT challenged missionary training institutes related to ICRC-churches to position (Reformed) Ecumenicity and related concepts in the centre of the curricula for Missiology.

² In IRTT's program for pre-field training of missionaries I use the well known (and contested) socio-historical and sociological concept of 'Modernisation' and the resulting situation of 'dualism' to provide some coherent insight in the structural disparity.

coming from the different sides of the 'global rift', being united in ecumenical networks and organizations.

This is the background of this paragraph of my speech: ECCLESIAL PARTNERSHIP FOR AID'.

Diagram IV will be used to explain what I want to say about this matter¹. The thin dotted line in diagram I – III has been replaced now by a thick dotted line, visualizing the 'Global Rift.'



An unavoidable field of tension: 'equality' and 'asymmetry'

Both partners, B and E in diagram IV, operate in an unavoidable field of tension. Two conflicting claims need to be given serious attention in policy and practice. On the one hand, both churches, as partners in this ecumenical relationship, are equal or equivalent.

This is inherent in the concept 'Ecumenicity' that was emphasized at the end of my second paragraph.

It is an important feature of Reformed Church Polity that one church should not be allowed to lord it over another church.

On the other hand, there is 'asymmetry' in the relationship, as one of the churches, let us say a 'poor' church, is in need and asks for help from the other, let us say a 'rich' church. The asymmetry regards the availability of material means (included finances) and other non-material facilities. Because of this asymmetry, power and the abuse of power easily creeps in into the relationship based on ecumenical equality.

An important element of this asymmetry is the quality of leadership: because of the position of the partner on the other side of the 'global rift', it is to be expected that it

¹ My presentation suggests that the aid-relation only starts after a full partnership has come into being; that is of course not true. Also in the situations visualized in diagram I and II 'aid', because of the structural disparity, was almost always part of the missionary projects (education, medical, agriculture, etc). For the sake of clarity I have reduced the analysis somewhat.

will be difficult to recruit sufficiently qualified people from the churches' constituencies to man the regional and central leadership units of the churches. In my analysis a properly institutionalized structure of the partner church is presupposed, but it needs to be acknowledged that the quality of leadership is often insufficient. This is an important part of the asymmetry and needs to be given central attention in strategy and policy for Aid (see below).

At the end of this paragraph I will mention some pitfalls for both partners that are related to this field of tension. In the next section some more 'organizational' and 'technical', yet very important, aspects of the aid-relation will explicated. This is done based on the observation that these 'technical' aspects are often neglected in the ways aid is defined and organized in the projects of Reformed / Presbyterian churches. This neglect is, in my view related to my previous observation and conclusion: the flaw in Reformed missionary strategy and policy that the concepts Ecumenicity and Partnership have not been positioned on the proper central place.

An ideal cycle of requesting and providing 'Aid'

Analytically some kind of a macro-cycle structures the actual process of the aid-relation.

The following main steps are discernible.

Inventory of needs and composing a request for Aid

Partner E in diagram IV is responsible for making an inventory of all the needs of the churches (D) that hinder the development of the church. Based on that inventory a request for Aid is composed to be presented to partner B.

Part of the requested Aid will be for clearly definable and institutionalized projects, in diagram IV visualized by G (for example an institute for theological training, established by the churches to get qualified ministers).

In general, only two types of aid can be requested: financial and personnel aid.

Deliberations and Agreement

The request will be discussed in bilateral deliberations.

The deliberation will result in an official Agreement between the two partners regarding the Aid that will be provided and regarding the way the provided aid will be processed and used by the other partner, ultimately for the benefit of the church.

Realisation of and Accounting for Aid

Based on the agreement the partner uses the provided Aid and accounts for it to the Partner that provided it.

In the next sections of my speech I will single out the second step and elaborate some of the main elements of the deliberations between both partners and the resulting agreement.

Deliberations about and Criteria for Aid

Two partners meet to discuss and deliberate about a request for Aid that has been handed in by one of the partners.

I will emphasize the things that are important for the donor-partner. Much can be said also that would be important for the other partner, but in the context of this speech I would rather concentrate on guidelines and conditions which are pertinent for the donor-partner.

Much can be said¹ about the important aspects for the donor-partner, but I will single out only two elements.

An elaborated policy is needed

The first thing I want to emphasize is the need for having an explicit, well thought through and elaborated policy². Participating in the deliberations without a clear policy instrument will lead to *ad hoc* input that will ultimately be detrimental for the partner relation. Consistency and continuity should not be dependent on the fact that always the same persons are assigned to take part in the deliberations, but should be based on an explicit policy.

It is also a signal of taking the partner and his interests serious; providing aid is not just a matter of 'doing good out of charity', but a manifestation of maturity in relations and of understanding the complexity of the 'global rift' and the sensitivity of the mentioned field of tension.

A central element of this policy is the set of agreed upon criteria to be used discussing the request for aid from the partner.

Criteria

The request handed in by the partner needs to be assessed by using some criteria. I mention only some of the total set of criteria.

First of all, it should be clear what type of program the donor-partner is willing to support and providing aid for. Some categories might for some reason be excluded. This exclusion and the reasons for it should be made clear to the partner.

An important criterion is related to the question: is the total request-package balanced? It is to be expected that aid will be requested for different components of the development of the church. It is necessary that the donor-partner evaluates whether main things of the development of the church get main attention.

¹ In IRTT's programs, both the program aimed at the sending churches in The Netherlands (and sometimes even abroad) and the program for missionaries who will be sent abroad, we elaborate extensively on these aspects, as we consider this of great importance.

² Having such a strategy and policy is part of the need for centralization and professionalization. In the RCN, mission work, since the 1950s, was very much decentralized: local congregations and committees, manned by volunteer members of the local congregation or supporting other local congregations, appointed by the local consistories, were charged with doing all that was needed for the management and development of the mission project abroad. Since the 1970s the need for some centralization to create the structure that would be able to contribute professional input to the mission work, was increasingly acknowledged. At present there is some kind of combination: sending churches are still organized in a regional decentralized way, but co-operation with the central professional structure has been made obligatory for the sending churches.

Two possible forms of one-sidedness will be mentioned. One of them is when in an unbalanced way societal aspects of being church are emphasized while the (so to say) 'core business' of being a church is neglected: preaching (either in the church or the missionary preaching outside the church), teaching, pastoral coaching of the congregation, etc.

The other one is when needs for the 'bottom' are overemphasized and the need for the 'top' (institutional strengthening, capacity building) is not given the proper attention. Of course, the 'bottom' (daily life of people in church and society) should ultimately benefit from all development plans and aid, but a well functioning structure ('top') is an absolutely necessary condition for a church as denomination to be able to function in society, in the state, in ecumenical networks, and to be a mature partner in a partner relation for Aid.

Another important criterion is what we like to call 'complementarity.' This means that the requesting church, before requesting aid, should have inventoried which means the church has available to meet the listed needs. All aid is additional, complementary to the optimized efforts of the church itself, up to the limits of its potentiality, to meet the needs of the church¹.

The last criterion I want to mention is that the requests for aid should be related to a 'local frame of reference.' The most concrete example in this respect is the request for aid to enable the church to pay ministers in the church. This has been a hot item in mission policy, worth a special conference². When this type of Aid is considered to be legitimate, then the pay for the ministers should in some way be related to local (regional, national) scales for payment; the donor-partner can legitimately require to have insight in this underlying policy of the church.

Two additional remarks I want to make.

When requests for personnel aid are discussed, part of the deliberation is where that personnel aid is to be positioned.

In general, his position will be in the structure of the partner abroad, in one of the projects, established by the church (visualized by the triangle in diagram IV in project G).

Explicit and sufficiently detailed agreements about this position and the resulting arrangements for procedures (reporting, accounting, etc.) are very important.

Secondly, in deliberating about which aid can be provided, an option is to explore and stimulate to find support through the ecumenical network both churches are related to; this is visualized in diagram IV by both vertical arrows that connect both partners to the ecumenical network or organization. Being fully dependent on the aid in a bilateral relationship is not always healthy; extension of the network and diversification of relations can sometimes be a positive thing.

¹ This criterion replaces the well known concept 'self support'. This concept was originally defined, as one component of the set of 'three selves', in the colonial and imperialistic stages and in our view did not take sufficiently into account the effects of the 'global rift' (modernization, dualism) on the mission fields, that started to manifest itself in those times and nowadays more forcefully set the stage for partnership. This speech did not provide room to elaborate on this.

² IRTT plans to organize a conference on this issue for the sending churches in The Netherlands in November 2005, under the title: 'Economie der Oecumene'.

An Agreement and Strategic Transparency

Deliberations and negotiations result in agreement which will be the basic policy instrument for the next phase, in which the agreement is carried out. The duration of that period is of course part of the agreement.

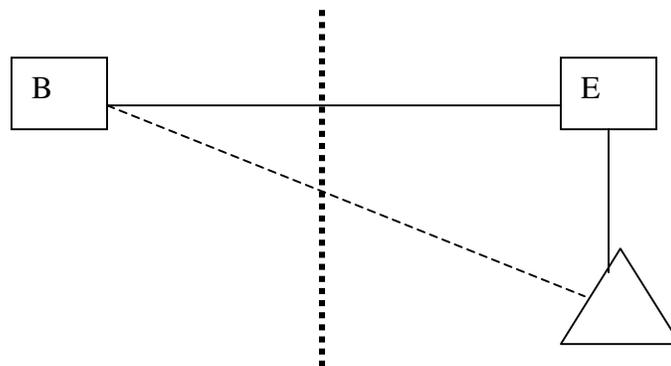
In our view, it is important that in some kind of a 'preamble' the spiritual and strategic basis of the Agreement is expressed. Key concepts of that basis will be: the world wide glory of God, the significance of the church in its context, Reformed Ecumenicity, mutuality of equal churches in spite of a 'global rift', etc.

This 'preamble' should not be the required spiritual and ritualistic beginning of an agreement on Aid, which is then the real document, full of details about financial and personnel aid, about procedures and deadlines, etc. This preamble is to be something that is really acknowledged by both partners as the basis of the partner relation.

It is very recommendable in the process of coming to and renewing of partnerships and agreements, to now and then organize a conference in which representatives of both partners go through these basic things to create an atmosphere of what we call 'strategic transparency'.

Pitfalls

The structure as visualized in diagram IV can be simplified a bit by singling out the main actors in the structure:



I want to use this simplified model to present some of the pitfalls that I observed. These are pitfalls that can hinder the functioning of the partnership and the processes taking place in this structure; again, I cannot be comprehensive and I will single out only some elements that we consider to be important, based on experiences as was explicated in my introductory paragraph.

The pitfalls I have in mind concern basic attitudes and views that are hold by one of the three actors as visualized in this diagram towards the other actors. Those pitfalls regard the attitude towards and views of the other actors in the diagram. Also on the

side of the partner abroad there are risks of pitfalls that could be elaborated¹. In this speech I will concentrate on pitfalls related to the donor-partner and to the *expatriates* (personnel aid positioned in some project of the partner abroad) towards the partner abroad.

Problem reduction

The main pitfall probably is: problem reduction; complexity made simple. I like to give some examples.

On the side of the donor or the expatriate, there is sometimes a reduction of the complexity by overemphasizing the cultural aspect of the situation. We then pretend to know very intimately the culture of the brothers involved in the partner organization, and with the aid of that knowledge everything can be neatly explained: 'typically ...'.

In this case, the turbulence and dynamics of modernisation and change in society, economy and culture is not sufficiently taken into account. Culture is easily seen as an almost unchangeable 'thing', independent of conversion, education, mobility and other changing circumstances, from deep down in the people, determining the lives of people and their styles of doing things. It is an easy solution which often seems to fit, but not seldom is doing injustice to the actual complex set of factors that play a role in the behaviour of brothers and sisters.

Somewhat related to this first one, there is a way of reasoning that neglects broader structural influences that have a formative role on the micro-situation in which the work is done and aid is provided and used. Pressure and claims of macrostructures and world historical constellations are not taken into account, while assessing the development of the micro-situation. The need for professional input in strategy and policy is then not felt and not given shape. Broader ambitions of the church in the national context (societal, political) and international ecumenical networks are then easily not honoured. The need for institutionalization and professionalization of the church structures is interpreted as elitism, alienation of the 'top' from the 'bottom.' Too easily the church is locked in a some isolated position.

Sometimes problems are reduced to simply ethical problems. Requests for aid related to fair pay or the provision of modern facilities are easily interpreted as the wish to get one's share of the pie: 'Those guys are just seeking our money and that's it!' In this way the complexity of a process of emancipation is not really understood, the process people go through when authority and responsibility in the churches are assigned to them, in a turbulent society going through modernization, sometimes in combination with postcolonial deterioration. Much injustice is done by simplifying this complexity by making it only an ethical problem: greed, lack of responsibility, personal enriching, etc. Of course it cannot be denied that some people are indeed greedy and trying to enrich themselves and really ethical problems should not be

¹ Several times IRTT had the opportunity to be involved in processes of structuring partner relations for Aid. That provided ample opportunity to observe things happening on the side of the partner abroad. Also in the literature material about this can be found.

blurred by 'soft' understanding of the complexity of their circumstances; but on the level of strategy and policy, professional insight in complexities is absolutely necessary.

Loyalty

One last thing I want to mention, which is especially important for 'missionaries', sent as 'personnel aid' to function somewhere in the structures of the partner. In our view, their basic loyalty should be towards the church they serve. This means that the 'vertical' line in the simplified diagram here above is more important than the dotted line connecting the sending church and the 'missionary'. The position of the 'missionary' should not be on the line B-E that visualizes the partner relation. Their primary loyalty to the local church might even result in advising the church to be critical to their donor-partner, which is his sending church! Furthermore, in my view, this primary loyalty to the church does not allow to form a 'mission team' that functions as an actor in the triangular set of relations as visualized above. The 'missionary' is part of the project he has been positioned in, together with colleagues ('missionary' or national) being in the same project; there is no reason to gather based on the status of being 'expatriate' or 'missionary', while being in different positions in the organization of the partner.

Conclusion

In this paragraph, in addition to the previous analysis about 'Ecumenicity' and 'Ecclesial Partnership', I have explicated on the one hand some structural, technical and organizational aspects and on the other hand some aspects of a more personal, spiritual and attitudinal nature.

Much more could be said, but these have been singled out, as I consider them on the one hand to be very important and crucial in an asymmetric relation between two partners being equal in position, and on the other hand quite often neglected or underestimated its importance in mission strategy and policy of Reformed Churches.

4. Conclusion

In my speech, I have been emphasizing 'complexity', 'turbulence', 'field of tensions' and some other problematic attributes of the missionary situation, suggesting that mission is just one big problem; related to that I pleaded to acknowledge the need for 'zooming out' and take into account in our strategy and policy for Reformed mission, broad concepts as Ecumenicity, Partnership. Furthermore, this leads to an appeal to be serious in Reformed mission professionalism and broad training.

Emphasizing this is not contrary to the conviction that in mission, as in all other responsibilities and programs carried out by the church, we ultimately depend on the blessing of the Lord, as is expressed in Psalm 127.

As for all the 'actors' involved in this great effort of the church, the ultimate tool we need is wisdom: all professionalism and knowledge and education are useless without the wisdom coming from the Lord (Proverbs 2:1-11).

When my assessment of Reformed strategy and policy to some degree is true, things need to be changed. Again, wisdom is what is needed. That was the reason for the motto¹ of my speech, written on the handout:

He was a wise man who prayed:

*God, grant me
the serenity to accept things I cannot change,
the courage to change things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.*

Thank you.

¹ I found it in: J. Herbert Kane: *Winds of Change in the Christian Mission*, 1973.

Proclaiming the Gospel Among the Sikhs: Telling God's Story

Tony Zekveld

Having ministered among the Sikhs in the GTA for the last 10 years, a community which now numbers 150,000, I still feel at times that I am scratching the surface. At times, I scratch my head, thinking, “How do I minister the Gospel effectively among the Sikh people?” Developing relationships with families (not just individuals), no doubt, is key, as is winning their trust through a consistent expression of Christ-like love and devotion. Hospitality is a way of life for them, which is a wide open door for the sharing of the Gospel.

Many are listening. Many are reading the Holy Bible, even in their own language. Many request prayer, as if to suggest, “Your God lives. He hears and He is able to answer prayer.” Yet . . . and here is the struggle . . . many hear the message of salvation and as they are listening, they often agree. They reinterpret what they hear to fit their own religious world view. No doubt, God by His Holy Spirit is able to open the heart of man to repent and believe in Christ, but the question remains: how do we go about bringing the message with the aim of dismantling their own religious world view or at least getting them to question their own world view?

Which raises the question: who are the Sikhs anyway? Briefly, Sikhism is a reform movement within Hinduism, tracing its roots back to AD 1469, when their first guru, guru Nanak, was born. In an effort to bring the two warring nations, the Mughals (Muslims) and Hindus together, Nanak came with this message: “there is no Hindu, there is no Mussalman . . . so whose path should I follow? I should follow God's path. God is neither Hindu nor Mussalman and the path which I follow is God's.” He called all to share the same creed, whether Muslim, Hindu or non-Hindu. Gradually this religion formed and consolidated itself into what Sikhism is today -- under their tenth (and last) guru, guru Gobindh Singh, in AD 1699. During this formative period (Nanak – Gobindh Singh), a new language and script arose, a distinct Sikh philosophy was established and a code of conduct was defined. The socio-political context may also be a point of interest to us. This religion emerged in an area which was considered the passage way for the Mughals to enter into India. These people of the north became the defenders of India and were called by their last guru – the sant-sipahee; that is, saint soldiers, which also, in part, explains their “military look”. Today this region is known as the Punjab, the homeland of the Sikhs. There are 25 million Sikhs worldwide. The vast majority speak Punjabi as their first language.

The religious world view of the Sikhs is essentially Hindu and is worlds apart from the Christian world view. The Sikhs suppress the Creator-creature distinction, presuppose a circular view of time (not linear) and, being an inclusivistic religion, they presuppose that all religions lead to God. The idea of “one way” for “all mankind” is a foreign, even a silly, idea in their thinking.

Keeping this in mind, how do we proclaim the Gospel among the Sikhs? The history of missions among the Sikhs offers us very few answers in this area as many have laboured for years without seeing a breakthrough and receiving little fruit. Santosh Raj in his book, Understanding Sikhs And Their Religion: A Christian Perspective, writes “the Punjab was never a favorite place for foreign missionaries of all denominations, being always resistant to the gospel . . . Many mission fields were opened all over India,

but very few were in the Punjab.” Only now are Christians in Punjab witnessing something of a breakthrough. In many ways this is a pioneering work. I, for one, am learning along the way.

I want to suggest this afternoon that, in our preaching among the Sikhs, we allow propositional truth to shine through the stories/narrative accounts which God has given us in the Holy Scriptures. What follows are some personal reflections from ministry experience among the Sikhs.

1. Placing Particular Histories within the Broader Story

Sikhs, as we have noted, trace their particular history back to AD 1469. They have their gurburbs; that is, their many religious festivals, reenacting the life and events surrounding their ten gurus and other saints. Yet how does their particular story fit within the broader story or history? They don't know. Many have no idea. They have what they call “their myths.” But their scripture, like all other religious sacred texts, apart from the Holy Bible, has no “story-line.” In the Sikh scripture, there is no mention of Adam, Abraham, Moses, David or Jesus. These names are entirely foreign to them. So where do we begin?

The particular history of Sikhs, as all particular histories, fits within a **universal** history. Therefore, as with the Apostle Paul among the Athenians in Acts 17, we tell God's story beginning with the account of Genesis. Here the Sikh may discover their link with mankind in general. And God tells us that story of mankind in Genesis 1-11, before He deals with the particular history of Israel and His plan of salvation for the world beginning with Abraham in Genesis 12. He tells us about the origin of a sinless world, how sin came into the world through our first parents, God's plan to redeem the world through the Seed of the woman, and the origin of the different nations and languages of our world.

More often than not, I have witnessed the powerful effect of Genesis 1-11 has had on the Sikhs. I will give a couple examples. After reading Genesis 1, Nidhan Singh, a prominent leader among the Sikhs, was so intrigued by what he read that he called me and said, “God worked six days and He rested the seventh day. Did He need to rest?” Another gentleman, Amreek Singh Phull, read portions of Genesis 1-3 in Punjabi as we sat at the table together. As he heard God's story he discovered that Adam is the father of us all. He then extended his hand towards me and said, “that means we are brothers!” He had not heard about this before. Six months later, Amreek's friend Sher Gill came from the Punjab for a visit. He called me and asked, “Do you have time this afternoon so that we can meet? I need two-three hours.” When he came with his friend, he asked me to retell him everything I told him. I told him God's Story and illustrated God's Story by drawing a time line on the white board, emphasizing that time is linear. History has a beginning and an ending.

The Gospel of John also brings man back to the beginning of God's Story, the beginning of mankind, even before, and connects the reader directly to Christ! “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Central to Sikh religious thought is the concept of the Shbd (shabad) which means “word.” Their scripture speaks of the “shbd” as living and eternal. The “shbd”, they say, “is God”. This is an effective way to connect them with our Story, not to suggest that

what they believe is the same, but to accent the difference between our world views. The living “Shbd“ is Jesus, the One and only true eternal “Shbd”. Through Him, all things were created. He manifested the Divine Naam or Sat Naam (“Sat Naam” is an article found in the Sikh creed which means “True Name”) to us in His incarnation (John 1:14) and He has explained God to us (John 1:18). John 1 brings us back to the story line of Genesis 1-3, indeed, it walks us through the entire Old Testament; that is, the story of creation, man’s fall and the universal need for redemption in Christ. This “Naam” is Jesus, for “there is no other Name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Victories are achieved when I hear a Sikh say, “Jesus is different from our gurus. Jesus has a lot of power!” I may then say to them, “Read the Gospels! Discover who this Jesus is for yourself!”

John 1, then, is an important place to begin with the Sikh. It places them in the context of a universal history, a linear history. It is older than Hinduism itself and by this we can challenge the Hindu claim that Hinduism is the oldest religion in the world! John 1 also may be used as our point of contact to accent other differences; that is, the Creator – creature distinction and the uniqueness of Jesus, the “Shbd”, as the apostle Paul does among the Athenians in Acts 17:16ff. As well, the Lord Jesus will return again at the end of history. The Sikhs really have no eschatology, no concept of heaven or hell. Hell, as some have told me, “is coming back to this earth again in another life form” and heaven is “merging with God.” I can explain heaven and hell to them propositionally, but better that I refer them, for example, to Jesus’ description of heaven and hell from Luke 16:19ff: The Rich Man and Lazarus and allow them to ask further questions. Illustrating the **differences** between our world views, through the use of Biblical story, is an effective means of challenging them with the truth of the Gospel.

This brings us to our next point.

2. Answering Their Questions Using Stories

In answering their questions, I may refer to the Nicene Creed or to our doctrinal statements. The answers are clear and to the point. But then again, after explaining the truth to them, they may look at me somewhat “starry eyed” and nod their heads in agreement. Let us remember that the Sikhs are a Biblically illiterate people. As with children, we need to begin with the basics. Not long ago a Sikh man approached me and asked, “who is the head of all the churches in Toronto?” As a part of my answer to his question, I showed him our “Apostles’ Creed” He responded by saying, “Oh, we believe the same thing.” He did not see the difference, or at least, did not admit any difference. I remember one time when a Hindu journalist came to our home. He was interested that we placed our ad for free Bibles in his newspaper. As we were discussing, he talked about how he liked Christ and had great respect for Him. He was also raising a few questions. We quickly brought him to the truth of John 14:6: “Jesus is the only Way.” Somehow I thought afterwards, that while we were bringing the truth to bear upon this gentleman, this truth was not really being communicated. He kept on agreeing. Over time, I have come to see the wisdom of allowing this truth to shine through the stories and metaphors from the Gospels. Wasn’t this the method of our Lord Jesus? Morton, in his article, “Narratives and Questions” writes, “God gave us His “unified Storybook”. So

using stories has the Creator's approval. Answering difficult questions with stories is nothing new --- in fact, Jesus did it" (p.174).

Recently, I was asked to write an article for Desi News magazine on "Handling Disappointments." The readers are largely the younger crowd among Sikhs and Hindus. Immediately my mind went to Lord's Day 10-11, which is indeed a beautiful summary on the Biblical teaching of God's providence. I began quoting a section of it in my article and I thought, "this is somewhat abstract." How can I make this teaching more clear? Then I thought about the life story of my grandparents which my grandmother put into writing and which was entitled "Memories." I communicated the truth of Lord's Day 10-11 through her life story, her story of faith.

Allowing propositional truth to shine through the stories of the Bible, even life stories, is an effective way of communicating the truth of the Scriptures. And even in my preaching on Sundays, I am going through the stories God has given us in the Old and New Testaments. In so doing, I communicate to the Sikhs: 1) the way things once were, 2) how things became what they are, 3) and how God through Christ restores all things to what they should be. The "meta-narrative" to use Don Carson's terminology must shine through again and again.

3. Using Biblical Narratives in Preaching

I was on the field six years among the Sikhs before we began meeting together for worship on Sundays. This work requires much patience, perseverance and prayer; in other words, relationships, relationships, relationships . . . hospitality, hospitality, hospitality. . . learning their language on the way.

We began with a very small group three years ago. I wrestled with where to begin in the Scriptures and how to communicate the message. For starters, I decided to use Rev. Henry Versteeg's chronological study of the Bible entitled, "The History of Salvation: God's Story." This we did for the first two years. The messages were very brief, both in English and Punjabi, also typed in both languages. They were distributed to those present. In these messages, I acquainted them with the stories, showing them that this is real history – factual events and people, emphasizing God's faithfulness and love despite man's sinfulness and man's need for a Saviour. Week by week, I placed a timeline on the board, marked by a beginning and an ending, with Christ at the center of history. I allowed for responses and questions during the message. Ernest Paul, a Christian from the Punjab, was always present to assist with questions I did not understand in Punjabi. The worship service remains simple. We open with a Scripture in Punjabi – making sure others open their Bibles and follow along, sometimes having them read the passage. We then sing Psalms and Hymns in the Punjabi language, followed by a prayer, a message, a prayer and conclude with a Psalm/Hymn.

Since February, the Lord has provided two more men, one a pastor from India, Rev. Peter Nathaniel and another gentleman, Mr. Joseph Singh, to assist us in the service. I am now preaching through the Gospel of Mark – acquainting the people with the life and ministry of Christ. We now have established a practice that all questions and comments come after the service. Anyone may speak. We encourage them to vent their questions, struggles, even disagreements – as this helps us to understand them and also enables us to guide them in a patient way. We do this so that they may know that our

doors are open even for the disagreeable types, with the hope that they may continue to hear the gospel..

This describes, in general, our pioneer work among the Sikhs. This calling requires a long-term, even lifetime, commitment. As I see it, there is no way we can short circuit this long road as we see God working among them Sikhs step-by-step. But as He does this I also witness that the Lord is working in our lives as missionaries step by step as we grow in our understanding of this endearing people.

Some Helpful Sources:

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*We do not preach in a vacuum:
the challenge of missionary preaching in the twenty-first century.¹*
Ian Wildeboer

Introduction:

As most of you know, I share this paper on preaching in a missionary context without any firsthand knowledge. And yet, notwithstanding this burden of inadequacy, I am standing before you this evening for this reason: this topic demands my (and our) attention. Jesus himself indicated that homiletics and mission will continue hand-in-hand until the end of the age. Jesus says in Matt 24:14, *"This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."* And as I have been ordained as a preacher of the Word for the work of mission, the topic of preaching and mission demands my foremost attention.

At the same time, this is a bit of a journey for me—a journey to becoming an effective missionary. You are joining me at this juncture, as it were. Like any journey, it begins with planning, and more particularly, questioning. In a sense, I have been forced to ask a lot of questions on this journey. From rather existential questions like: 'who am I?' To a more practical question: how do I organize my first 40 sermons? And everything in between! These questions have led me to entitle my talk: **"We do not preach in a vacuum: the challenge of missionary preaching in the twenty-first century."** This is the negative expression of the positive reality that we preach in a dynamic, changing world with many conflicting worldviews, cultures and religions. So we commence this journey with that in mind.

Still, it is my hope that in some way you may glean something from my studies especially for those who remain at the home-front. Some missiologists, and I think especially of Dr. Michael Goheen, speak about a reflexive action in missiology. Foreign mission it is argued, is forcing us, or has forced us, to evaluate what we are doing on the home front. Goheen writes, "The churches of the Majority World...leads us to answer this question: how can we be a more faithful witness in our society (Goheen 2005:2)? He and others defend that the challenge that confronts the missionary who leaves is not far from the challenge that one may have in sharing the gospel with those living in poverty in our inner-city, or those practicing Sikhism, Islam, New-Ageism or living as agnostics or atheists in the communities and homes beside us. This came out during the day sessions as well. In a word, we're all in this together. I will visit this reflexive action of mission at the end of my speech. Right now, the challenge before me is preaching in another country---PNG---and so we begin there.

1. Clearing the Way or setting the right framework.

A lot could be shared here but let me address two questions.

- a) why focus on preaching?
- b) It is enough to know that we must preach?

¹ This paper was shortened from the original paper submitted to Dr. AJ DeVisser as a final paper for my diploma in *Advanced Missiology* (2005).

a) Why focus on preaching?

You all know the answer to this question, so I need not linger here for very long. But to say that in less orthodox churches this may not be the case. Those of the universal camp prefer dialoguing with other faiths as the *modus operandi* for bringing the gospel. Or, those wanting to be more contemporary, as it were, speak of inner-city reclamation, discussion groups, world awareness studies, renewal liturgies etc. In my research I also realized that preaching is seemingly less discussed in mission journals.¹ But we profess that according to God's economy of salvation the gospel must be proclaimed (Matt 28:19-20). So we read in Romans 10: 14: (NIV) *How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?"* SO we preach.

b) It is enough to know that we must preach?

Otherwise stated: is it enough to know that we must simply preach? We learn the language and begin preaching.² There is some truth to that. Paul exhorts Timothy with this timeless command: "*Preach the Word* (2 Tim 4:2)." Paul also says to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 2: 2 (NIV), "*For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*" It is the Holy Spirit that convicts a lost and dying world of its sinfulness. It is the Holy Spirit that gives freedom! No one can say "*Jesus is Lord, expect by the Holy Spirit,*" as we learn in 1 Corinthians 12:3. From this, it might seem redundant to entertain a whole paper on the challenge of missionary preaching. It is seemingly quite simple, learn the language and begin to preach the Word, and the Spirit will illuminate hearts.

However, Paul also writes to the Corinthians a few chapters later, in I Corinthians 9:20 (NIV), "*To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.* Paul's Apostolic claim in chapter two that, "*he knew nothing save Jesus Christ and him crucified,*" does not contradict what we just read. In chapter two Paul wanted to show that the message he preached was centered entirely on Christ and not himself or another man. The latter text as David Garland in his commentary on First Corinthians comments, "*the preacher of the changeless gospel could adapt himself, however, to changing audiences in seeking their ultimate welfare, their salvation* (Garland 2003: 435)." It is not the arduous work of exegeting a text that needs to change as Rev. Wes Bredenhof pointed out, but the question of communicating that work effectively, sensitively, clearly and boldly. It is a question of homiletics. Scripture and confessions demands that we preach to all men,

¹ In my research I spent considerable time at the website of *Evangelical Mission Quarterly*. By all accounts a formidable source of material for missionaries. However, of the six hundred or so titles of articles that I scanned since 1980, not one had 'preaching' or 'sermons', or 'proclaiming the gospel' in the title. Sure it might have been addressed in an article, but I thought this was curious at best, or at worst, a very disconcerting reality that the matter of preaching received such little 'title' press.

² Darrell Whiteman shares a story of a young missionary in the 19th C who was sent to South India. This missionary was later rebuked by the sending Church for learning their culture and religions. Their reasoning followed that he was sent to preach the gospel, not learn their culture or religions. Mission during this period was indeed a tool of imperialism, according to Whiteman. Nothing save the gospel needed to be learned and applied (Whiteman 1984: VIII).

knowing, however that we preach in time and space, to one race and then to another, one people, then another. We do not preach in a vacuum, but in a world with a kaleidoscope of cultures, which as one author stated are said to be elastic (Whiteman: 60). We confess in CofD III/IV 5 that *"the promise of the gospel...ought to be announced and proclaimed universally and without discrimination to all peoples and to all men, to whom God in His good pleasure sends the gospel"*

We can't escape the responsibility to know about another culture. I had opportunity to interview two former missionaries regarding this paper: Rev. Jouk Kruidhof and Rev. Henk Venema. Both served in Irian Jaya and now live in Holland. Both said we must take time to read their stories, learn their culture, and be well versed in their traditions. Henk Venema concludes that if we don't know them, and their religious background, we will have difficulty preaching to their heart. Missiologist David Hesselgrave affirms this when he says, *"we need to know the message for the world, but also the world in which the message must be communicated"* (Hesselgrave 1991: 69)."

This leads us to the next question:

2. How do we know to whom and for whom we preach?

a. The danger of labelling.

A seemingly simple way to begin to know to whom we are preaching is to work off the labels that we may have read, or heard, or developed ourselves. Now, labelling or stereotyping is easy, it is convenient and it ostensibly carries elements of truth. Take, for example, those who live in the inner-city of Hamilton. We have heard or thought that they are all impoverished, mentally unstable, seemingly dysfunctional, malodorous people. So the labels have concluded. Papuans are no less at the brunt of such labels. To that end, I have come across such labels as: 'they are a lazy, uneducated, simple, primitive people and lacking in self-determination.' Or, even more pejoratively, they are head hunting, bug eating, half-clad nomads. These labels have resulted in some asking: 'are you not wasting your time going there?' I think it is obvious that such labelling does nothing for Christ's commission. It is wrought with sin and ethnocentricity! Labels can remove the willingness to know how to, or have the willingness to share the gospel effectively with others. Allow me to illustrate this point with an example of a gentleman who attends Streetlight. His mom was a doctor and dad had a doctorate of philosophy, I think. This man was attending McMaster University when his parents divorced and his brother committed suicide. He cracked under the pressure of this pain and now is dealing with a severe case of Schizophrenia, forced to live in a lodging home. Now apply a label. A label assumes he is just a poor, mentally unstable, unhygienic individual that lives in a lodging home. But such a label does nothing to deal with his pain or allow him to realize the glory of the gospel of grace!

The challenge facing us as missionaries, or more generally, as brothers and sisters of Christ in this time and place is this: we must constantly rid ourselves of labels. We must go much deeper. Missionaries, church planters, bearers of the gospel must bring the gospel of grace, with grace—that is, with a deep-seated love for and willingness to learn of differing peoples situations without leaning on embedded labels.

b. The importance of comparing world-views.

I will begin with myself and then move out from there.

First: reality?

Having grown up in the West, I have been taught to see the world as real. We have been taught to view history in a real way (although transmitted through the bias of the historian or journalists). It still happened, that is a fact. Many Melanesians (Papuan) have grown up under oral tradition. These oral traditions have taught them to see the world as an illusion. The question of whether something is real or not is inutile, they both are said to coexist in the mind of a Papuan. There is a 'both/and' mentality. That means that you can share history with them, but they may very well feel this as fictitious, and not reality. I heard this example to highlight this very point:

A certain West Papuan minister who had been preaching the gospel for some time, and training fellow Papuans in Scripture had the privilege to fly to Holland. He flew there and back and upon his return the members of his church asked him how it was? He said, 'the most amazing thing happened to him.' When he was flying over the Middle East the pilot pointed out where Jerusalem and Israel was. The sky was clear enough to see the land below. And with great exuberance he stated: it is true, Israel is a real place.¹

We might smile at the innocence, but this point needs to be remembered when preaching on the world around them, or sharing the historical facts of Scripture. In a sense, through preaching the gospel they need to feel, touch and taste the land upon which our forefathers lived, and no less our Saviour walked. History has to be etched in their mind as real, not fictitious.

Second: The Natural World

On another note, the West with its control-type mentality lives with a false sense of pride and security when it comes to the natural world. And although this is mitigated by my Biblical worldview, which warns of false-security (Luke 9:24) or vain hope, or the folly of man's wisdom (1 Cor 1) it is hard to divorce ourselves from holding on with great expectancy to the securities offered in advanced medical science, for example. In other cultures, like Papua, many people are overwhelmed by nature. McDowell in an article entitled the, "The Millennium Bug in Melanesia: Contextualizing Cargo Cult Beliefs," writes that "*...dangers are seen everywhere in nature, and to try to understand them or to overcome them would be considered foolishness, (McDowell 1999: 147).*" Not surprisingly, there is a sense of helplessness that befalls people in such a culture. Such fear has caused them to hold onto their animistic beliefs. Animism is broadly defined as a human being's effort to understand, control and manipulate ancestors, personal and

¹ It was Rev. Jouk Kruidhof who shared this with me.

impersonal spiritual forces in order to live in harmony with them (McDowell:148). To be sure, the urban dwellers in Lae may be moving more to the Western mindset of control. Harvey Cox in his article "The Secular City," writes: *"I have heard urban dwellers claim that for them the spirits of the forest, river, mountain and sea are fading...not so the spirit of the dead relatives (Cox 1984: 243)."* People, even Christians will travel hundreds of kilometres to a dead relatives funeral to appease that spirit. In the end, my overt security and their insecurity must both be corrected by the realistic and lasting security in our Sovereign Lord and Christ.

Third: Materialism is a global problem.

Materialism is a global epidemic, I think. We are told to focus on the 'here and now' with all the zest for life that we can. The Western mindset informs us to equate material wealth and physical well-being with the ideal life lived. Many in Melanesian, especially, but not exclusively, in urban centres, also crave material wealth enjoyed in the West. Maybe not surprisingly this thirst for what the West has to offer has filtered through their mythological, animistic worldview and resulted in what has been coined as 'cargo cults.' These cults assume that what the westerners have, (energy, cures, goods i.e. cargo) could be theirs through magical efforts or the manipulation of their animistic gods. The challenge here is to realize and remember that materialism and wealth has an unrelenting grip on the people of Papua as it does the people here. Further to realize that we as missionaries can and do fuel this fire. In fact, even when I don't preach I come with a para-message (an unspoken message of success, and wealth) that can in many ways blur the real gospel of grace. The Western missionary inadvertently can become a stumbling block due to his material blessings. We talked a little about this at the conference.

Paul Hiebert concludes, *"it is important to recognize the quality and extent of our cultural biases when we work in cross-cultural settings, for then we can work to reduce ethnocentrism and mutual misunderstanding (Hiebert 1985: 137)."* He continues, *"if we do not proceed through this analysis we are very likely to introduce a culture-bound (Western) gospel to others (:137)."* For if the gospel message is loaded down with the Western cultural trappings the message of grace, rest and true security and communion in Christ may become unclear and confused.

3. The Character of the Gospel

a. Brings clarity...

Understanding culture allows us also to understand religion, in many ways. In fact, it can be said that religion and culture and the words that define both of them run together like blood and oxygen in the body of mission studies. Stuart Chase in his book *The Tyranny of Words* explains this:

[They] gave words to sensations, feelings, emotions. They identified these feelings with the outside world, and personified outside events. Sun, moon, trees, were

given feelings like men, and a soul was assigned to each. In the old mythologies, gods or demons in human shape made everything with their hands. These remarkable concepts became rooted in the structure of language and the structure, if not the myth, remains to plague us to this day (1938:22).

The meaning of a word is contractual. It is for this reason I have to move from the naïve assumption that when I preach the gospel in Tok Pisin that there is automatically a more or less one-to-one correlation made between what I say and what they understand. This is not often the case. Thomas Aquinas defended that we do not "*name things as they are in themselves, but as they are to our minds* (see Hesselgrave 1991:67)." Take for example a phrase from I John 4:8 "God is love." Since one cannot mean what one does not understand, the pagan cannot mean the real God of whom the Christian speaks (:41). Some tribes in West Papua have as their god, a sleeping god called 'Refafu'. While he sleeps, he is watching until one of the rules of the ancestors is broken, for example. This forces him awake in order to exact punishment. However, while awake, he relinquishes his omnipresent view. The contrast is stark if we compare that with Scripture. We serve one who does not sleep and always remains all seeing, knowing, powerful etc. All this to say, that name, God, can mean two totally different realities in the mind of the sender and in the mind of the receiver. Furthermore, the word love finds its root meaning in what God has done. God is love. "This is how we know what love is: God loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (John 4:10)." That means that without divine revelation we will not know who God is, or what love is. The phrase "God is Love" therefore, will, for a traditional Papuan who is steeped in paganism, be meaningless, and clouded in a mind that is gripped by the fear of 'Refafu' and not Jesus Christ.

This means that the challenge to bring the gospel across in a clear and understandable way can only be met through the clarity of the gospel itself. Aquinas states that word must be understood *analogically*: "its meaning in one sense is to be explained by reference to its meaning in another sense (see Hesselgrave: 67)." That is how we share the gospel. The meaning of the name God, or love, or salvation, is to be explained by reference to its meaning in another places in Scripture (:67).

b. Is normative.

We can say that because Scripture is normative. The Reformers exposed error in the Catholic abuse of Scripture by insisting that Scripture was normative; 'Sola Scriptura,' they preached. It alone is capable of teaching us about God and what he has done. This reality allows us to deal with the confusion that rests with false religions. This truth also allows us to move forward, staying clear of ideologies that emphasis the context over the content of Scripture, while at the same time not *ignoring* the context in which the content is preached.

c. Is transhistorical/transcultural

Since Scripture is normative and objective it is also trans-historical and trans-cultural. Wm Larkin Jr. in his book, *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics* states that,

"God's dealings with humankind in every age provides ample evidence that meaning can be conveyed transhistorically...making understanding and application of the message possible (Larkin Jr 1988: 100)." By speaking of the transhistorical nature of Scripture we should also add that Scripture is transcultural or supercultural. God's dealings with human beings in a covenant-communion relationship, through history, also serve as a key for grasping the transcultural nature of the message of Scripture. Further, the Book of Acts also provides ample evidence of this. The gospel was presented to Parthians, Medes, Elamites and a host of other nationalities (Acts 2:5-13) on the day of Pentecost. The truth of God's revealed plan of salvation was presented to an amazingly diverse group of cultures. We were reminded of this glorious reality in the past two days. We spoke of the Lord's work in Papua, Brazil, among the Babines, among the Chinese, the Sikhs, Portugese, South Africans to mention a few—all guided by the same gospel.

d. Transforms culture

It is not only transcultural but it transforms culture. It is not enough to know something of the Papuan's cultural and religious milieu, if we do not understand that this culture needs to be transformed by Scripture. The gospel must penetrate to the core of the culture and religious experiences and change it. Through the Spirit it can confront and change the sin-infected meanings for Christ's glory (Conn 2000: 184). This reality also forces us to move from a positive to a realistic view of the culture and people that we are reaching. We must realize as Calvin stated that they worship the *umbratile numen*, the nebulous all pervading being, fabricated by us to fill the emptiness caused by our unwillingness to recognize the true God (Calvin's Institutes I:5). Finally, we should not be ashamed of pointing to this truth, regardless of its effect on their cultural and religious ideologies. As McDowell rightly defends, "*we should not be faulted for carrying out this edict to preach this truth given to us by Christ, nor should we apologize for the changes that occur in a culture and society because of this message* (McDowell 1999:145)." The message of Christ is foolishness to those who are perishing (1 Cor 1:18).

4. Where do we begin with our preaching?

This brings us to the question: *Where do we begin with our preaching?*

There is no one, right, or perfect way to preach the gospel in a new area. There is no perfect sermon series, or structure that will cut through the barriers imposed by language or conflicting worldviews in a simple and clear way. Nor can we assume an approach or method that worked elsewhere in the world will work with equal effectiveness in Lae, PNG. For example Rev. Zekveld stressed in working with the Sikhs the need to commence with the Old Testament and drawing out a line linearly from there with the cross in the centre. Before we get to a possible approach for the people in PNG, there are, however, four things that provide a bit of a guide in developing a structure.

First, we must preach the whole counsel (*την βουλην του θεου*) of God (Acts 20:27). This is self-explanatory. We cannot cut corners; the whole Gospel is what Christ commanded his disciples to teach (Matt 28:19).

Second, we need to realize that all Scripture points to Christ. The Lord Jesus states in John 5:39, (NIV) "*You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by*

them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me..." Therefore, we must preach Christ and him crucified (I Cor 1:23).

Third, as Reformed missionaries we need to be reminded that God works through history and therefore we must preach redemptive historically. In one of my interviews it was stressed that when this type of preaching and teaching takes place a strong attack on paganism, which is not historical but magical, or not diachronic but synchronic, takes place. Kees Haak points out that you must constantly present the historical line to Christ and ultimately, to our final redemption (Haak 2005: lecture). Rev Zekveld stressed this as well.

Fourth, we preach within the framework of the covenant. God came to man and bound himself to an everlasting relationship with him that is secured in Christ. We must draw non-believers into the rich blessings and joys shared in this covenant of love.

Having said that where do I begin?

Do we begin by speaking of Jesus Christ and his work, especially on the cross? Is it better to start with the Old Testament rather than the New Testament? Is it better to pick different events in the history of redemption and string them together? Or is it better to start with the Catechism, at least structurally, our only comfort and then sin, salvation, service? Are these methods mutually exclusive?

Various opinions have been given to this. Bavinck, for example, says "it is frequently undesirable to begin directly with the preaching of Jesus Christ, for the simple reason that a sufficient basis has not yet been established (Bavinck 1960: 143)." However, he then addresses the problem that with an Old Testament start and then moving to the New Testament many people can find themselves at home, merely embracing a new set of rules and regulations. They may begin to see this new religion as a religion with a *nova lex*, a new law (Bavinck: 145). Bavinck provides no solution to get out of this dilemma.

Darrell Whiteman argues on the other hand that we should begin with Christ. He defends that we should begin with the incarnation, then Good Friday and Easter which is far more meaningful than beginning with creation for the Melanesians. He doesn't say why, however (Whiteman 1984: 106).

Henk Venema, Jouk Kruidhof and Kees Haak all argue that we should find a via media between these two approaches. To that end, they defend a concentric circles approach. That is, you begin with the gospel in a nutshell and each time following you move out explaining more of the gospel always been pulled into the centre by the centrifugal force of the gospel: that is, Christ. Venema summarized this approach: "always come back to the beginning with the core of the gospel and add new information to that (Venema 2005: interview).

Although not one of the above mentioned methods is a perfect presentation of the gospel, I find much merit in the use of the concentric circle approach. It seemingly affirms the call of the Scripture (John 5) to preach Christ, while avoiding the pitfalls of legalism (Bavinck) or preaching the New Testament without the foundation of the Old (Whiteman).

(5.2) Sermon Series:

Therefore, I propose the following 40 sermons in this way:

1. (3)¹ The Gospel in a nutshell:—Creation, fall, redemption. (Share this message highlighting slightly different things three times in a row).
2. Next 6 sermons: Cover the gospel in six sermons.
3. (10) Summary: The Gospel in a nutshell.
4. The following 6 sermons: OT History of Redemption.
5. (17) Summary: The Gospel in a nutshell.
6. Then 6 sermons on the Life of Christ.
7. (24) Summary: The message of the cross.
8. Then 6 sermons on the Holy Spirit and the Apostolic Church (Acts):
9. (31) Summary: The message of the cross.
10. Then 6 sermons on the Epistles and Revelation focusing on our response to the gospel and the end times.
11. From here the process can begin again—beginning with the OT, moving to the life and work of Christ and our eternal salvation, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the Apostolic Ministry and our life of thankfulness.

I also attempted to group the different themes into six part series as recommended by Henk Venema. This allows people to stay connected to the critical gospel message, while not exhausting one subject at the cost of presenting a balanced approach to other important themes of Scripture. Taking the advice of Jouk Kruidhof I also sought to ensure that redemptive history-Genesis to Revelation-is told in story form, as Scripture presents it. This also allows the preaching to reinforce the liner timeline from creation to Christ's return upon which the Papuans must also find themselves. The listener must be rooted in God's work less he attempts to rest on his own merits. Finally, I was told not to move too quickly to Christian living—a critique by the way levelled against the Alpha course.

6) What can be gained for us at the home-front?

In the process of leaving, I have realized that much of my studies centre on understanding the culture and religious fabric of the peoples to whom I will be ministering—hence this paper. However, part of this process cannot be far from the minds and hearts of the rest of us living here in Canada.

I think we all know that mission need not be modified by the word foreign. Since it is the calling of the Apostolic, or Catholic Church, mission is not first and foremost a matter belonging to the last frontier, as some have called PNG, but mission is a matter of the Church in the community that she is found. The apostle Peter writes in 1Pet 2:9 (NIV), "*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*" I mention this because tonight we were focusing on foreign mission, but not at the exclusion of the work of mission here on the home-front. Indeed, the whole world is God's mission field.

¹ The bracketed number is the sermon counter.

Foreign mission is forcing us to look reflexively, as it were. This is a good development in our churches as we learned in the past few days: Hamilton, Winnipeg, Sikhs, Portuguese, Chinese, Quebec etc. We've had some lively debates about integration of ethnic communities. It is forcing everyone to ask: do we really know and how are we learning what ticks in the hearts of the people that live beside us, in our inner-cities, in our communities, First Nations reserves, ethnic communities?

It is noteworthy that back in the early nineties a repatriated British missionary to India, Leslie Newbigin, commented that the Western world is the most difficult missionary frontier in the contemporary world (see Goheen:3). This may be all the more the case as Reformed orthodox churches on Canadian soil we may be becoming more marginalized by contemporary society. We are said to suppress progress: the Gospel of truth is seen as antiquated, anti-rational, anti-feminist, anti-same-sex marriage, anti-human rights, anti-freedom etc. The danger or threats seemingly more apparent, but in all of this there is opportunity. Yet, it is because of the growing anti-Christian sentiments held in this culture that we again can be reminded of the 'missionary' mandate that confronts us. And it is this changing culture, which is exchanging its more Judeo-Christian values for a new form of paganism (or neo-paganism), that we must confront with the gospel.

As missionaries, but even as pastors of a local church, we do not preach in a vacuum. The world is changing on us, even the world outside our doors. The gospel is the same, always the same, but the people whom it must reach change. Culture is elastic and we need to know its elasticity. Calver in his article, "Postmodernism: An evangelical blind spot," defends the idea that we as Christians need to be prepared to face a cross-cultural challenge when it comes to engaging the world around us with the gospel (Calver 2005:1). That world is Papua for some, Brazil for others, Canadian ethnic communities for others; and for all of us it is the people next door. The challenge is all of ours. We need to know who's out there, not superficially by applying labels, but by applying our hearts and minds, redeemed by God's grace, to learn how to minister to the pain, the loss, the brokenness and the sin that so deeply entangles the world around us.

And yet we go with great expectation! We go in the knowledge that our King and Lord has sent us and He will be with us to the end of the age, wherever we are. For we go under His authority! To God be the glory forever!

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